



TIME WILL TELL:

A Story of Society.

BY S. W. FULLOM,

AUTHOR OF "THE GREAT HIGHWAY," "FOR LOVE OR MONEY,"
"THE MAN OF THE WORLD," ETC., ETC.

"The end crowns all,
And that old common arbitrator, Time,
Will one day end it." SHAKESPEARE.

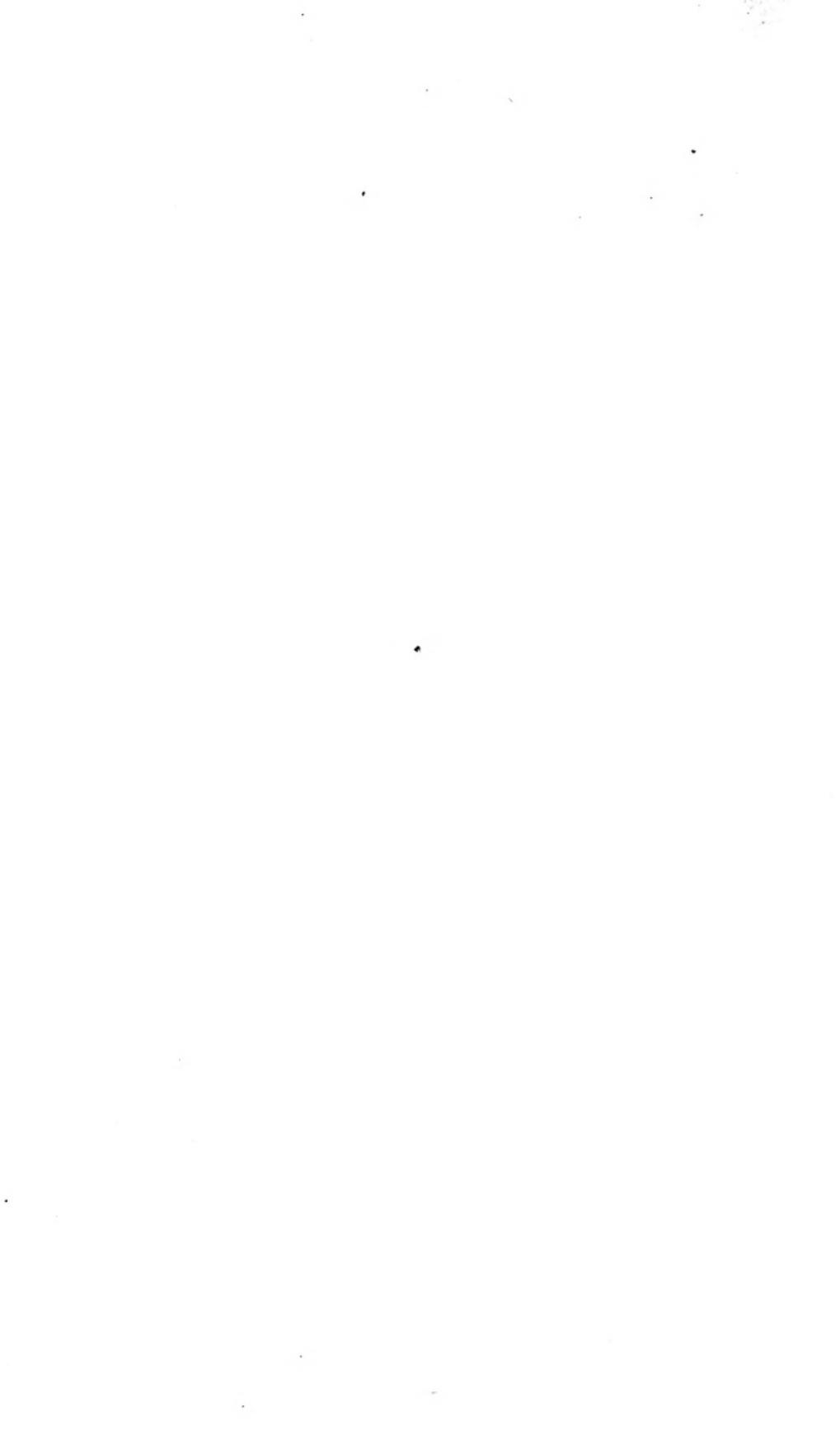
IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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TIME WILL TELL.

CHAPTER I.

CLOSE OF THE POLL.

THE nomination went in favour of Harrifield—at least, the Mayor so decided, though how he arrived at the conclusion, except through his Yellow predilections—or potations, nobody could guess. Certainly, there seemed as many hands held up for Mr. Mockright, but this was to eyes that did not see double, under the inspiration of brandy-and-water. And it was felt that the point did not signify. Little interest, indeed, attached to the nomination, which attracted only the non-electors, and these gathered

merely to hear the speeches, and shout themselves hoarse for their respective colours. In respect to opinion, the candidates left them not a pin to choose ; for the difference between them was simply that one advocated progress by steam and the other by smoke, and the question to solve was which was which. This everybody decided according to his light, or rather his colour ; for the Yellows ascribed the smoke plan to Mr. Mockright, and the Blues to Harrifield. Meanwhile, the crowd round the hustings dispersed, though groups lingered in the streets and market-place, or gathered in front of the committee-rooms ; and at night the public-houses resounded with revelry till the last moment.

But the tug of war came with the next morning. As early as seven o'clock, the town was aroused by a band of music, seated in a van, drawn by four horses and hung with yellow ribbons, which, advancing towards the market-place, led the way for a posse of boardmen, urging the electors, in the largest yellow letters, to " Vote for Har-

rifield," "Harrifield and Civil and Religious Liberty," "Harrifield and Equal Rights." The boardmen were followed by a banner, borne by a sturdy operative, and inscribed with a demand for "A Fair Day's Wage for a Fair Day's Work," and behind came two more operatives, one carrying aloft a penny roll, which a placard announced to be the "Tory Quatern-loaf," and the other making a similar display of a cat o'-nine-tails, described by a second placard as the "Tory cat out of the bag." Then came the Bramble-court carriage and greys, with Harrifield and the Mayor side by side, while Harrifield's committee walked on either hand. Loud cheers greeted the procession, as it perambulated the town, drawing gazers to every door and window, and many a fair damsel waved her kerchief to Harrifield and wished him success. Harrifield, on his part, did all that Ravel could exact in the way of energy, smiling till his cheeks ached, and almost bowing his head off. Several times he stood up in the carriage, and thus exhibited not only his fine person, but his toilet, which

was faultless. But it was not destined to remain in this unblemished state. For suddenly the ear caught the notes of another band of music, and presently appeared a procession of Blues—van, boardmen, banners, and carriage and four, attended by the Blue committee on horseback. The Blue boards appealed to the electors to “Vote for Mockright,” “Mockright and Constitutional Liberty,” “Mockright and the Altar and the Throue,” “Mockright and Ships, Colonies, and Commerce.” And here came the special feature of the Blue procession—a car, bearing Alfred Mockright’s wherry, attended by four sailors, or rather bricklayers in sailors’ clothes, one of whom carried the Union Jack. This device excited general applause, as did an elevated branch of bramble, ticketed “Harrifield Grapes from Bramblecourt,” and a dish of soft soap, on a flagstaff, representing, “Whig Reform.” Mr. Mockright was backed up in the carriage by Sir Ralph St. Maur, who had been prevented standing for the borough himself by the state of his health,

but who looked remarkably well for a sick man, or, indeed, for a healthy one. Mr. Mockright did not bow so gracefully as Harrifield, but he kept his head going; smile he could not, but he looked very majestic, which was almost as good, and everybody could see that his gold chain seemed to have been made for mooring a ship. Hence he met a cordial reception.

But this state of things did not last long. As soon as the rival processions entered the market-place, they began to hiss and hoot each other, and all at once they were engaged in a fight. The thing was as sudden as the battle which sprang up round Sancho Panza, when he brayed like an ass. How it began is a point in dispute to this day in Swashborough. One fact is certain—a rotten egg struck the mayor's nose, and another hit Sir Ralph St. Maur in his eye at the self-same moment. Sir Ralph, forgetting the state of his health, sprang out of the carriage, and collared a yellow coal-heaver—one of the novelties of the occasion, and asking him where he would have it,

marked his face before he had time to decide. Instantly they were the centre of a conflict, in which the two processions inextricably blended, the rival boardmen rushing at each other, and the committees pelting, whence it came to pass that the Tory loaf was hurled at Mr. Mockright, and knocked off his hat, while Harrifield received an instalment of Whig Reform in a dab of soft soap; moreover, eggs flew about, scattering destruction—fortunately only to linen. The affray was becoming serious, when the police rushed in, and separated the combatants, both sides, in truth, being well satisfied with this arrangement, though they drew off, shouting defiance. Harrifield, besoaped and egg-bespattered, was wishing to become invisible, when his band rang out the air of “See, the conquering hero comes;” and Mr. Mockright alighted at his committee-room, hatless, but with the sailors waving the Union Jack over his head, and the Blue music playing “Rule Britannia.”

Eight o’clock opened the poll, and the first elector to appear was Sir Ralph St.

Maur, who, of course, voted for Mr. Mock-right. This drew hurrahs from the Blues, and the Yellows indulged in a like triumph, when a dashing waggonette brought up Mr. Mullet, the son-in-law of Lord Bramble-court. There was cheering from both parties when Sir Ralph St. Maur and Mr. Mullet shook hands in the polling-booth.

“Sorry we’re not on the same side, Mullet,” said Sir Ralph, “but the best of friends must divide on principles.”

“Yes, we must stick to our colours,” replied Mullet. “I am thorough blue, you know.”

“Blue! you don’t say so!” cried Sir Ralph, in an ecstacy.

“Blue, of course,” answered Mullet; “why, what do you take me for?”

“My dear Mullet, I take you for one of the best fellows in the world,” exclaimed Sir Ralph, seizing his hand, and almost wringing it off.

“Ha! ha! none of your election tricks,” laughed Mullet, giving him a playful push.

“ It is no use ; for I tell you I am blue to the backbone—true blue.”

“ May Heaven bless you !” murmured Sir Ralph.

But Mullet had already made his way to the polling clerks, who, having overheard his colloquy with Sir Ralph, were prepared, in spite of their own senses, to hear him call out “ blue, blue ! ” In a moment his vote was recorded for Mr. Mockright.

Nothing could surpass the exultation of the Blues at this open defiance of Lord Bramblecourt by his own son-in-law, and the air rang with their acclamations, while confusion seized the Yellows, who vented their feelings in murmurs of “ rat ” and “ turncoat.”

De Jonnes, who drove the Bramblecourt waggonette, was astonished at this demonstration, but when the Blues almost carried Mullet off his legs, and wanted to take the horses out of the waggonette, and drag him through the town, something like the truth flashed upon his mind. He struck out with his whip, and the horses broke from the

crowd, and soon bore the waggonette clear of the town.

“Who the deuce did you vote for?” he then demanded of Mullet.

“Why, whom do you think?” answered Mullet. “This election seems to set you all mad. Whom could I vote for but Harrifield? I nail my colours to the mast, and am true blue for ever!”

“Yellow, you mean; our colour is yellow.”

“Yellow, be hanged!” cried Mullet. “You told me, and Lord Bramblecourt told me, and Harrifield himself twice over told me, that our colour was blue. What are you staring about? I will swear you all said blue, and I have voted blue.”

“The deuce you have! Lord Bramblecourt will go mad.”

“He has gone mad, and so have you all,” cried Mullet, with gnashing teeth. “Talk of women! How can you, I ask, expect them to be practical, when here is a peer of the realm, a member of Parliament, and a liberal candidate, who blunder in this way?”

"I wouldn't face Lord Bramblecourt, after this, for a thousand pounds," said De Jonnes, "so I will just drop at the station for the express, which will be here in half an hour. You can take home the waggonette."

"That is very cool. You won't face him yourself, but you want me to do it, and he will brazen me out that he said blue—I mean yellow—when he said yellow—no, blue, I mean. You may do as you like, but I am off by the express."

In the end, they agreed to go away together, and leave the waggonette to the groom, De Jonnes dispatching a note to Harrifield, to account for their departure, and at the same time to recommend that Mullet's misadventure should be concealed from Lord Bramblecourt—at any rate till the election was over.

But the story got wind, and raised a laugh at the Yellows, who vainly averred that it was without foundation, and a weak invention of the enemy. Harrifield's committee, indeed, found it necessary to turn the current of public thought, and issued a poster,

stating in the yellowest letters, "THE
BRIBER IS KNOWN."

Soon afterwards, each committee announced the state of the poll, which was respectively given thus—

<i>Blue Committee.</i>	<i>Yellow Committee.</i>
MOCKRIGHT . 24	HARRIFIELD 24
Harrifield . . 23	Mockright . . 23
Majority for } —	Majority for } —
MOCKRIGHT } 1	HARRIFIELD } 1

These bulletins might have been more lucid as to the relative position of the candidates, but they clearly showed that the contest ran close, and this gave a fillip to both parties. Mr. Mockright's canvassers canvassed each other more actively than ever ; Lord Bramblecourt's agent put on the screw at its highest pressure, and Sir Ralph St. Maur visited all his tradespeople expressly to announce that he was a blue, and would spend his money among blues, to the last farthing he possessed—a declaration which, being un-

derstood as having a double meaning, was received with enthusiasm by some, and dejection by others, according to the degree of fear entertained for Lord Bramblecourt. This fear did not operate to the extent it might have done, owing to the precautions of the parliamentary agent, who everywhere represented Mr. Mockright as the real owner of Bramblecourt, and guaranteed protection to his supporters. Hence the day wore on without altering the chances of the candidates ; and even when the last moment was approaching, and every voter was believed to have been polled, no one could guess the issue. This crisis found Mr. Mockright awaiting his fate in the best room of the ‘Green Dragon.’ By his side, sat Alfred, looking over reports of the poll, and trying to reconcile their statements.

“ I come to the same conclusion as you,” he said, at length, “ it will be a tye.”

“ One vote more would make me Member for Swashborough,” said Mr. Mockright, standing up, and thrusting his hands in his pockets.

"And that vote, sir," observed the parliamentary agent, at this moment entering, and cautiously closing the door in his rear—"that vote, which will establish the independence of Swashborough, and give a triumph to the Cause, you have only to take your hand out of your pocket and—and, in fact, secure."

Mr. Mockright looked unutterables, but made no reply: indeed, he was trying to follow Mr. Sloman through the mazes of his speech, but lost the clue.

"Let us secure it by all means," cried Alfred more alert.

"*By all means*, certainly," answered Sloman, returning to the door.

"Stop," said Mr. Mockright. "What have you come to me about it for? You have got full powers: you can do what you like; and I must say, end how it will, you have done very well. But why do you come to me now?"

"Well I needn't enter into particulars, sir, but I haven't exactly full powers, you know. You exacted a certain promise of me,

remember. However, we won't dwell upon it. Mr. Alfred has said quite enough."

"Let him speak for himself, and I will speak for myself," said Mr. Mockright, "and as to your promise to me, tell me what you want in plain words."

Mr. Sloman elevated his eyebrows.

"Out with it," cried Mr. Mockright. "I never buy a pig in a poke."

"Well, the price of this pig is £100," said Mr. Sloman; "and looking at the state of the market, considering that there is a disease among pigs, and that a pig is just now worth his weight in gold, I think £100 isn't out of the way."

"You mean, a man has come for a bribe?" said Mr. Mockright.

"Well, sir, there is no occasion to go into explanations," replied Mr. Slowman. "I have remarked, as a general rule, that explanations lead to difficulties: they involve, in fact, more—"

"Never mind," said Mr. Mockright. "The man is waiting for an answer, I suppose?"

“He is, sir.”

“Will you give it him?”

“Assuredly.”

“Then tell him I’ll see him danged first.”

Mr. Slowman bent his head, and walked out of the room.

The father and son looked at each other.

“You have lost the election,” remarked Alfred, getting up, and stepping into the middle of the room.

“What’s that to you?” demanded Mr. Mockright. “If I like to spend £4,000, it is my own, isn’t it? You have nothing to do with it.”

“I have, in this case, because this isn’t what you call a matter of money; it is a matter of character; and I feel prouder of being the son of Andrew Mockright to-day, when he is defeated, than I ever did before.”

“Shake hands, then,” said Mr. Mockright. “And let me tell you, we can’t be laughed at, though I am beat. I don’t intend to sneak off with my tail between my legs, but I’ll go to the hustings, and have my say about it. I can hit ‘em hard.”

He looked at his watch. "It is time we set out," he continued, "so put on your hat."

The whole town was moving in the same direction, and not the town alone, for farmers came in from the country, and thronged to the spot. Swashborough had never been so crammed within the memory of that patriarch, the oldest inhabitant. There were arrivals on foot, and arrivals in vehicles, spring carts and dog-carts, and not a few carriages, the smart appearance of which threw a deeper cloud over the election cabs, placarded with, "Vote for Mockright," or "Vote for Harrifield," and now standing empty. It was in one of these hearses that Mr. Mockright and Alfred reached the hustings, escaping recognition till they alighted.

But now their appearance was the signal for an uproar, which spread to every part of the assemblage, the Blues hurrahing, waving their hats, and pealing Kentish fire, while the Yellows broke into groans, blended with cries of "What have you done with your

money?" and "You won't come here again." A like demonstration met Harrifield a moment later, only that the parts, of course, were changed, the Yellows giving the cheers, and the Blues uttering the outcries. Nor was the agitation confined to the mob, for soon a commotion pervaded the hustings. Something had happened, and everybody became so excited that they would listen to no explanation. At last a polling-clerk elevated a board, bearing this announcement:—

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Mr. Mockright had won, after all. There was a moment's silence, when the Blues burst into a shout of triumph, but Mr. Mockright resisted the appeal for a speech.

"Things are altered, you see," he said to Sir Ralph St. Maur. "I could only crow over the lord; and, dang me, if I'll hit a man when he is down!"

CHAPTER II.

HARRIFIELD IS CONSOLED BY HIS FRIENDS.

HARRIFIELD was deeply mortified by his defeat, of which he had no suspicion up to the last moment. Few took misfortune so lightly, and we have seen his apathy under reverses, which would have crushed others, but here he met something more, something that touched his sensibilities, inasmuch as it embraced not only personal humiliation, but a rebuff to his family. Still, the occasion showed his character favourably, as far as he gave it play. After a moment of what seemed stupor, he reflected how heavily the blow fell on Lord Bramblecourt, and, desiring to relieve him of as much vexation as possible, wrote to propose that

they should have a meeting, at which they might come to an arrangement about the expenses. These he engaged to defray altogether, provided Lord Bramblecourt took no measures against such of his tenants as had voted on the other side. He represented that clemency to these offenders was a matter of policy, as well as generosity, since it would be a claim on their gratitude in future contests, while it averted scandal from the present. Lord Bramblecourt deigned no reply to this letter, and refused to see Ravel, when he sought a verbal answer; whereupon Harrifield started for London.

His excitement had time to subside during the journey, and he arrived at the Albany in his usual impassive state, his mind oblivious of what occurred yesterday, and heedless of to-morrow. He gave himself up to dreaming of Annie. This lifted him out of reality, and he never reflected that his loss of the election, and the liabilities he incurred by the struggle, having rendered his position desperate,

might lessen his chances of obtaining her hand. He had, indeed, thought of such an eventuality, during the heat of the contest, but now he saw everything in a comfortable light, or rather he saw only what he pleased. This was Annie in her beauty, amiable and gracious, and pledged to be his bride.

His reverie was interrupted by the appearance of Travers, who had been bound over to shun the election, as the field it opened for practical jokes, alike on friend and foe, might have shaken his fidelity, if not his reason.

“So you have lost the day,” he said. “A bad job, on the whole; but couldn’t be helped, I suppose; and, after all, you had a sensation.”

“Stuff!” replied Harrifield. “Do be serious, if you can.”

“I wish I could be anything else. I try, but going on every day like a clock is a serious business. It would be livelier if I could strike the hours.”

“You seem to want to strike *out* the hours by the way you go through them.

But never mind this now. Tell me who is in town, and what has been doing the last fortnight."

"Well, nobody is in town, and nothing has been doing."

"That is odd, for the time of year. What has become of Lady Clara?"

"She got such a fright when she heard of Mullet's blunder about his vote, that she gave him no peace till he started for Paris, fearing Lord Bramblecourt would have them both rattened. So they set out last night, De Jonnes going with them; and a friend of mine saw them all steam off for Ostend, Mullet evidently thinking they were on board the Calais boat, as he had sent their luggage there. It will be inconvenient for them, but they will get a sensation by it."

Harrifield smiled. "I am sorry for Lady Clara," he said, "but it really serves De Jonnes right. He had strict orders at Swashborough not to lose sight of Mullet, and he let him loose, and he has now done the same thing at Dover. But have you seen anything of the Blandfords?"

"A little; in fact, I dined with them last night, and met a regular gipsy there—a Miss Balcombe, who must be one of your skeletons, I think; for she seemed quite overcome when the late evening papers came in, and showed you had lost the election."

"The deuce she did! I suppose I must feel very much obliged to her, though I can't say I have the honour of her acquaintance, either as a skeleton or a gipsy. At the same time I hope her interest in me was not so marked as to excite the attention of any one but yourself."

"Well, I believe nobody observed it but Miss Blandford, and she happened to be sitting by her."

"And pray how did Miss Blandford take it?"

"The news—very quietly; indeed, she made no remark about it, at the moment, but she seemed concerned for the gipsy. However, it was all over in a minute; and it might have nothing to do with you, after all; for when I again mentioned the election, the gipsy was silent."

“ And Miss Blandford ?”

“ She said it didn’t matter to you, as you would have very soon tired of Parliament, if you had got in ; and that, perhaps, it might suit Mr. Mockright better.”

“ Very cool,” said Harrifield, colouring, “ and Mullet would say, practical. Not but what she may be right, too,” he added in a sadder tone.

“ Well, don’t go into the glums about it. Let us take a stroll out, and turn into the club, and the fellows there will cheer you up.”

“ I will meet you there,” answered Harrifield. “ I must go and call on the Blandfords first.”

“ It is no use. They were to leave town this morning ; Blandford being obliged to go somewhere into Devonshire, about his property, and the beauty being bound to Walton-on-Thames. They won’t be back for a week.”

“ A week ! That is, seven days, or one hundred and sixty-eight hours.”

“ Fearful !” yawned Travers.

"Anyhow, we will meet at the club, at seven," said Harrifield. "I must make one or two calls in the interim."

The time passed, in spite of melancholy, and seven o'clock found Harrifield at the Club door, punctuality being, as before shown, one of his excellencies. Travers was standing on the steps as he came up.

"Such a game here!" he said. "What do you think?"

"Nothing—I never think!" answered Harrifield.

"Well, Mullet and De Jonnes are inside."

Harrifield's lip twitched. "Hoaxed?" he asked.

"Sold, as clean as a whistle," laughed Travers.

"How did you manage it?" asked Harrifield, not sorry to have the defaulters punished.

"Hush! here they are;" murmured Travers.

Mullet and De Jonnes were, indeed, at his elbow, having caught sight of Harrifield, and sauntered out to meet him.

"Why, where have *you* come from?" demanded Harrifield.

"It is a mysterious affair," answered De Jonnes, solemnly. "We were just landing at Ostend, when the captain of the steamer called out for Mullet, and handed him a telegram, purporting to come from Lord Bramblecourt, and requesting both him and me to return immediately and meet Lord B. in town at six o'clock."

"We almost broke our necks to get here," said Mullet.

"Why, you had ample time," remarked Harrifield.

"Yes," said De Jonnes, "but Mullet consulted the railway tables for Sunday, instead of the week day, so we lost the train, and had to wait two hours at Dover."

"That is very good," cried Mullet: "didn't you tell me to look on the right-hand page?"

"No, I told you *not* to look at the right-hand page."

"Well, well!" exclaimed Mullet. "You stick to that still!"

"Never mind—these mistakes will happen," observed Harrifield. "Tell us how you got on with Lord Bramblecourt."

"That is the part of the business we can't understand," answered De Jonnes; "for on going to Eaton Square, we not only found that Lord Bramblecourt hadn't come to town, but we saw Marlow there, and he recommended us to keep out of his way for the present."

"In fact, he said it was a hoax," cried Mullet, "no doubt got up by those opposition fellows at Swashborough. But it doesn't matter. Lady Clara has gone on to Paris, and we shall go after her to-morrow, and to-night we will have a bout of it."

"Yes; some of us have joined to give you a dinner, Harrifield," explained De Jonnes. "We want to testify our esteem for you on the occasion of your defeat, but we have agreed to taboo politics, as our party will include Dashwood and Sir Ralph St. Maur, who wish to show their good feeling for you."

"They would have shown good feeling

better by not so strenuously opposing me," said Harrifield, with a little bitterness. "However, that is over now, and I appreciate their friendliness, particularly as it will save us from speeches."

"Well, there will be your health to propose, you know, and you must reply."

This necessity a little dismayed Harrifield, but he resigned himself to fate, and entered the club-room. Here he met a cordial reception. Nobody, indeed, was more liked, or had a larger circle of friends; for while he was too indifferent to things to make an enemy, and always treated everyone with courtesy, his conversation, though only women could rouse him to animation, never lacked the attraction of wit. He now felt cheered by the companionship of his friends, and the interest they evinced in him, and his good spirits brought out his sparkle. The dinner was respectable, the wine passable, and, under these influences, everybody forgot their troubles, and warmed into jollity. The smallest joke told—and the jokes were both small and great, keeping the table in that

chuckle which is more agreeable than a roar. It is wonderful what men swallow on such occasions—wonderful as to the quantity, and more wonderful in the mixture, and in this instance there seemed no end to the dishes; but the eating ceased at last. All were gorged, and nothing remained but the feast of reason, and the flow of soul, which meant that each of the company must gulp down as much wine as he could absorb. When everybody had thus come to feel uncomfortable, up rose Mr. Mullet.

“I have been intrusted with the pleasing duty of proposing the health of our common friend, this evening, our guest,” he said. “I could wish the task had fallen to worthier hands [cries of “no, no!”]; but, since those around me are indulgent, I will be responsive [“hear, hear,” and “bravo!”]. I assure our friend, with all my [here Mr. Mullet intended to place his hand on his heart, but laid it on his stomach]—with all my heart, that I, and everyone here, honour him for the fight he has made against the Tory rascals of Swashborough [“question” from

Sir Ralph St. Maur, and Colonel Dashwood, De Jonnes tugging at Mullet's skirt]. If I am proud of him as a man, as a friend, and as a kinsman, I feel prouder of him at this moment, when he comes from this fight not a victor, but not vanquished, overcome only by those arts which he despises to practise, the arts of bribery and intimidation."

"Really," cried Sir Ralph St. Maur, starting up, "this—"

But Colonel Dashwood pulled him back, at the same time crying "no politics," and Harrifield called to Mullet to sit down, while De Jonnes kept up the strain on his skirt.

"I am sorry if my remarks offend any of the company," continued Mullet, whom this ferment only bewildered, "but if the cap fits, I can't see why they shouldn't wear it [“hear, hear,” from several Whigs.] Bribery and intimidation are the Tory weapons [uproar], and if ever they were brought into play, it was in this—"

"In the name of the prophet, Whigs!"

cried Travers, getting up behind the speaker, and sticking a fig in his mouth.

This diversion raised a laugh, under cover of which Mullet was got into his seat, and Colonel Dashwood called for a bumper to Harrifield, to carry out the purpose of the feast. The toast was duly honoured, but failed to restore harmony, Mullet insisting that he had introduced politics by request, and the company found at last that they could only avoid a break-up by adjourning to the smoking-room.

It was not till the small hours of the morning that Harrifield got back to the "Albany." He was accompanied by Travers, who flung himself into a chair, while the attendant presented Harrifield a letter, which after a long scrutiny, he pronounced to be from Lord Bramblecourt.

"You can go to bed, Slipper," he said to his man. And as he was left alone with Travers, he added, "Are you very drunk?"

"Not particular-larly," answered Travers.

"Do you think you could read this, and tell me what it is about?"

"I—I don't know that I—I am up to—that."

"How many lights are on the table?" asked Harrifield.

"One—two—three—three—no, two. Confound it, I believe there are four!"

"You won't do. I must make it out myself."

Travers kept his mind on the wax tapers, marking them with his finger, and muttering "three—four—no!" while Harrifield read the following missive:—

"DEAR CHARLEY,

"YOUR letter shows so much honourable feeling, that I have determined to accept the proposition for you to pay the expenses, and leave those rascals who voted against us, undisturbed. Perhaps, there would, as you say, be a row if I turned them out, and there must be a dissolution soon, when we will lay our plans to win. Meanwhile, I shall write to Lord Palmerston, and tell him

you have established a claim for some mark of his consideration, so you probably won't be a loser in the end.

“Ever yours,

“BRAMBLECOURT.”

“What do you say to that!” Harrifield cried to Travers. But Travers had fallen asleep.

CHAPTER III.

THE QUESTION.

THE emotion which Harrifield's defeat awoke in Jessie, had elicited marked sympathy from Annie. In fact, it confirmed Annie's suspicion that Harrifield was Jessie's early lover, and again she felt a desire to ascertain the point, as soon as they should be alone. But how to do this was the difficulty—whether by turning the conversation on Harrifield, and so inviting a disclosure, or by direct question ! She could only decide to be guided by Jessie's disposition at the moment ; for it was this disposition that had foiled her former attempt, when Jessie either shut her eyes to the overture, or did not understand its purpose. Cer-

tainly the rack would not extort the secret if she shrank from the confessional of Annie's bosom, and such was now Jessie's mood ! She looked on Annie as a rival, a successful one : and the torture of the rack was inflicted by Annie's tenderness, which she could not repel, yet was agonized to endure. Tell Annie that Harrifield was the lover of her youth ! As soon would she announce it in the street by the public crier. Find a confessional on Annie's bosom ! Rather should her secret be a consuming fire in her own, and keep her in perpetual torment. So she sat and smiled and took part in the conversation, speaking as little as possible to Annie, it is true, but with no appearance of avoidance, and always addressing her in the kindest tone, while her heart overflowed with bitterness.

What a relief to be in her own room—and alone ! Alas ! the relief was but for an instant ; for the next brought back the pangs of jealousy and a flood of burning recollections. She feared what had really happened —that she had betrayed herself to Annie,

or, at least, raised in her a suspicion of her passion. This was the explanation of Annie's tenderness : it sprang from pity ! The conviction startled Jessie, as if she had been pierced by a dart. Pity in such a case—from a triumphant rival, was contempt. How had she fallen ! In what an abyss she had been plunged by Harrifield's abandonment, so cruel and treacherous ! And now she was forgotten ! The tears gushed from her eyes, and her cheeks fired with shame, and her bosom swelled with indignation, as this thought, like a rushing avalanche, overbore every other. But it travelled with the avalanche's speed ; and if it left behind a waste, a mind seared and a heart crushed, it disappeared itself. She had no reproaches for Harrifield—at least, none that endured. The abandonment could not be imputed to him ; it originated with herself ; and how could she say he had forgotten, when she had shunned his presence ? Dolt that she was ! thus to lose the hour of her prime, and forsake the impression it had produced. But she did not linger on this

regret. Her mind turned from Harrifield to Annie, or rather it fastened on Annie—flew at her, as it were, without losing sight of Harrifield. All the claims of friendship were blotted out in that moment, and she remembered nothing but Annie's success and her own failure. Why was Annie to be so favoured? to have beauty and fortune and position, and, by the help of these, rob her of her lover! She cursed her fate, cursed the world, and would have cursed Annie, only that the words stuck in her throat. In imagination, she wrestled with Annie, threw her down, and trampled her under foot, as the women of old wreaked their spite on a rival's image. Those furies, indeed, seemed to gather round Annie's image in her mind, and pronounce their incantations, piercing the figure with pins the while, or tearing it limb from limb. And had women no vendettas now? Did the alternative of dagger or bowl go out with Rosamond, or were not rivals still stabbed and poisoned? The question awoke her to the frenzy into which she was hurrying. What were such things

to her, who had no taste for violence, and scarcely even cared for vengeance? She strove to calm herself, reflecting that it was not by brooding over her feelings she would attain her end, if attained it might be, but by seizing, and trying to guide events. Annie possessed the material gifts, she must meet her with the spiritual, and which were to prevail, *time would tell*.

Not a moment too soon did she recover self-control; for Annie was at the door. She called to Jessie as she knocked, and asked admission, and for an instant Jessie hesitated. It flashed upon her that Annie had come to speak of Harrifield, and she felt that she could better bear the trial in the morning when her fever had subsided. For this paroxysm of passion, which wrenched body and soul, awaking so many thoughts and such conflicting emotions, had been of no more span than a dream. The agony of years had been compressed into a few minutes, and it so far continued that she felt as if just awoke from a nightmare. Outwardly her bosom was still, but it yet

quivered within, and shrank from new laceration.

But this sensitiveness must not be shown, and, after the briefest pause, she let Annie into the room.

"I have come to have a little talk with you, Jessie," Annie said. "You know how early we are to start in the morning?"

"Ah! I forgot to tell you," replied Jessie; "but I shall be unable to go with you to Walton, and I shall have to start earlier than you."

"Not go with me to Walton! You really must, Jessie. I have told mamma you were coming, and she will think it so unkind: indeed, she has an impression that you purposely avoid her."

"What a notion!" exclaimed Jessie, yet colouring as she spoke.

"You have never seen her, you know," answered Annie, "and it is very odd there should be always something to prevent your meeting, even when we have made our arrangements." Annie pouted a little, but recollecting Jessie's position, assumed a

softer tone as she added—"I hope there is nothing now but what you can put off, Jessie?"

"I will put it off, if you like, but it will be a great trouble to me, and you know I can pay my respects to your mamma any time. Why not when I come back? Let it be so, Annie, and you will oblige me more than you think."

"I must consent, when you urge it this way, but I assure you it will grieve mamma, and spoil the pleasure of my visit to her."

"Rather my company would spoil your visit; for I am dreadfully out of spirits—at least, I am not well, and want perfect quiet and a little sea air, which I shall get where I am going."

"And if you come back quite happy, I shall be compensated for your temporary desertion," said Annie, slipping her arm round her waist; "but—" and she shook her head—"I am afraid, Jessie."

"Never shake your pretty locks at me," returned Jessie. "What are you afraid of? You are mistaken if you think my dejection

is caused by the old sore ; for I have got over that." An unconscious sigh belied her words, as she spoke.

" Well," said Annie, sinking in a chair, " I must sit down, though you have put out of my head all I intended to say."

" What a blessing ! for if you had retained it in your head, it would have kept you awake all night, and if you had put it into mine, it would have kept me awake. Talking just before bedtime always has this effect. So now go away, while you can sleep, and we will have our gossip out next time."

They fronted the toilet-glass, which reflected the image of each, their varied looks and style and feature, their rounded busts, each of faultless shape, yet each different, showing arms and shoulders that might have come from a mould, but which were yet distinct, alike fair, alike perfect, but somehow not the same. And both girls had every advantage of dress—that is, their dress bore the impress of fashion, yet showed no trace of its indelicacy, so that their neck and arms did not seem to be naked ; for they

derived a robe of grace from the enrobing round. Candlelight almost masked, too, the difference in their years, though this was plain to Jessie, as she looked up, and her eye lighted on the glass.

"Ah! if it would show us each other's minds, as it does our forms!" said Annie, following her glance to the glass.

"How disagreeable it would make us all!" answered Jessie, with a grimace.

"Why should it?"

"Because we are all such—such goodies, you know. Let us be content with the glass as it is; for we both look very well in it, and, as beauty is said to be only skin deep, we mightn't appear to such advantage if the glass lifted that veil."

Annie laughed. "I must let you sneer to-night," she said; "for I have no spirit to answer you. Indeed, I shall follow your advice, and go off to bed—only I must first ask you a question."

"Now don't frighten me," said Jessie, with mock trepidation, though her heart was really stirred. "You look as if you had been

reading about a murder, and intended to ask if I did the deed. No, positively no! so don't question me any more; but kiss and good night."

"Not yet. We are parting for more than a night, remember, and all this may be out of mind when we meet again. Nor is it anything to disquiet you. I only want to know if you ever met Mr. Harrifield before we went to Folkestone."

"A mouse, a mouse, after all!" exclaimed Jessie.

"You never met him before, then?"

"You forget how he startled me once on the river-side at Surbiton!" said Jessie.

"And that was your first meeting?"

"How can you ask such a question—you who know I first came to London with yourself, and with whom I have been living almost ever since! I think your romance will run away with you some day, or perhaps Mr. Harrifield will. Good night! good night."

They embraced, and parted, Annie with the impression which Jessie wished to convey, but would not directly affirm.

CHAPTER IV.

WALTON CHURCHYARD.

MR. BLANDFORD said nothing to Annie of the proposal of Harrifield for her hand. He did indeed speak about Harrifield, and drew a good augury from her remarks, and the interest she evinced in him. Her demeanour confirmed the report of Lady Clara that Harrifield was a favourite, and determined Mr. Blandford to refrain from seeking to improve his chances. He knew that this was a point on which women are sensitive, and that interference often nipped love in the bud, when it might, if left alone, have come to perfection : so he confined himself to keeping Annie in good humour, and partly with this view, and partly to remove

her from other admirers, consented that she should pass the week of his absence in Devonshire with her mother.

Annie was all behind in the morning, and thus had no opportunity for further conference with Jessie, who only had time to say good-bye at breakfast before starting. Mr. Blandford waited the departure of Annie, seeing her into the carriage, which was not only to convey her to Walton, but to remain at her disposal there till she returned.

Annie had looked forward to the visit, and, perhaps, it was even more fondly anticipated by her mother, who now felt interest in nothing but her. The long-dreaded catastrophe of Mrs. Blandford's life seemed to have come and gone, but it left behind a furrow, which wore down, as it were, and obliterated her apprehension of the uses of this world. Her susceptibilities of happiness were thus narrowed, and existence became a routine, endured rather than desired. It is true, she no longer passed the day in tears, or in vague terror; but it still brought a burden, which was heightened by her lone-

liness. Annie alone inspired her with hope. She liked to think of Annie's beauty, and took greater comfort in her affection, of which she had received so many proofs, and was continually assured by letter. Now her heart thrilled at the idea of a meeting. This was a pleasure indeed, and the prospect lightened her days, and helped her through the intervening time. At last, she clasped Annie in her arms.

"My dear child, how I have longed for you!" she said. And Annie clung to her closer. "Now let me look at you. Ah! you have been keeping late hours! I shall scold Lady Clara, when I see her, and make her give a bond for the future."

"Do I look so dreadful?" said Annie, gaily.

"Yes, you do," replied the now proud mother, passing her hand over Annie's tresses, as she took off her hat, and pressed a kiss on her brow. "I think it was really time to come and spend a week with mamma, at Walton."

"I think so, too, though I won't allow

that I have come to be either nursed or renovated—only to be petted.” And she followed the words with another embrace. “But I have something to say, and you must promise not to be vexed, mamma.”

“I shall be vexed, if it is anything to trouble you.”

“Well, it is the merest trifle, if you will think so. But I know how you have wished to see Jessie Balcombe, and that you have relied on her coming with me, and—”

“She hasn’t come?” said Mrs. Blandford, as Annie hesitated.

“No. She received a letter last night, which obliged her to go to some relative, and papa excused her. She asked me to say everything kind to you, about it, and that she would pay her respects to you on her return.”

“It is very strange,” said Mrs. Blandford, musingly.

“I assure you she appeared much annoyed that it happened so, mamma.”

“I don’t know,” returned Mrs. Blandford. “It gives me an unpleasant impression,

but, as you are such friends, I shall say nothing to divide you. And here is our luncheon; so now sit down, and when you are quite recruited we will stroll out a little."

Annie was glad that her mother took Jessie's absence so quietly, and, dropping the subject, ran on to other topics for her amusement. Thus they ate their luncheon, and spent an agreeable hour, when they went out together, and sauntered through the village.

The autumn afternoon was freshened by a southern breeze, which came over field and orchard and hedgerow, and brought a tribute from each, making it enjoyment to breathe. The scene, too, was soothing to a saddened mind, like Mrs. Blandford's; for the rustic dwellings, the ancient church, and the cheerful gardens, here teeming with flowers, there with fruit, and there again blending the two, formed, as it were, a picture of life in a frame of seclusion. The rustle of foliage alone stirred the air, and as for population, Annie could see only a few

children playing on the green, and a milk-maid following her cows. So mother and daughter arrived at the churchyard.

"This is the boundary of my walk," said Mrs. Blandford ; "and I could wish it to be my last bourne of all, when the time comes —the spot is so quiet, so solemn, and yet so pleasant. Shall we go in?"

"Pray do, mamma," replied Annie.

Pushing open the wicket, Mrs. Blandford entered the ground, and they passed under the shadow of the church, a pile almost grotesque, in its shroud of time, and rising amidst tombs and grave-rails in ghostly aspect. The spot was not desecrated by flaunting flowers like the graveyard of a suburb, where ostentation spreads its blazon of vulgarity on the very sepulchre, but a solemn yew and mourning cypress alone grew by the dead. Here was a churchyard which realised the "Elegy," which was an elegy itself, and Annie lingered to read the quaint epitaphs, now appealing for sympathy, now pointing a warning and now rejoicing in

hope. Happy village, where still reigns the pious simplicity of our forefathers, and bunkum is unknown.

"Mamma," said Annie, suddenly, "look!"

Mrs. Blandford followed her glance, and perceived two gentlemen, standing beside a half-sunken grave-mound. They turned at this moment, and instantly raised their hats.

"Mr. Harrifield and Mr. Travers!" said Annie, presenting them to her mother, as they came forward.

Harrifield showed great deference for Mrs. Blandford, and engaged her in conversation by light remarks on the village and surrounding country, while Travers explained to Annie how they came to be there. It appeared that he had found Harrifield in "awful need of a sensation," and thereupon proposed that they should take a box at Surbiton, for a week or two, and do a little boating; in pursuance of which project they had pulled up to Walton, and there landed.

"And could you find no more cheering haunt than the churchyard?" asked Annie, banteringly.

"Well, it is where Hamlet went, when he was out of spirits," replied Travers, "and Harrifield has rather the same notions—I suppose on the principle of taking a hair of the dog that bit him, if you will excuse the proverb. And the thing hasn't been particularly slow; for an old fellow showed us the church, and told us about that grave, where Harrifield has dozed for the last five minutes."

"And now you must tell me about it," said Annie. "I am sure it is very interesting."

"Oh, very! but I wasn't exactly attending to what he said, so I must refer you to Harrifield. Who is it buried there, Harrifield? Just tell Miss Blandford, will you?"

"Yes—and Mrs. Blandford, too," said Harrifield, with a polite inclination towards the elder lady; "for it will interest both. I might, indeed, use the words of Hamlet, Miss Blandford, and say 'alas, poor Yorick!' for that is the grave of a fellow of infinite jest, and, what is more, who wrote of Hamlet, and of Yorick, too. That unmarked

mound covers the dust of poor Maginn, a luminary in the literature of his day; the light of the *Standard*, and the founder of *Frazer's Magazine*. He died in this ~~village~~, where he was hiding from his creditors, and, with the ruling passion strong in death, was buried on trust, whence neither his funeral nor his grave has been paid for to the present hour."

"How sad! such a close to such a life!" exclaimed Annie, her eyes filling with tears.

"Well, he was a Tory," rejoined Harri-field. "If he had been a Whig, he would have died in the odour of promotion, but Tory ministers don't reward their literary adherents. When Pitt was asked to provide for Burns, he said that literature might take care of itself; and it has been remarked of the present Tory leader, Lord Derby, that though he is himself an author, he has dealt more ungenerously with literary men, than any of his predecessors. But this is nothing, now, to poor Maginn. Lying here, he may be envied more than Lord Derby, or even Pitt; for what stranger will ever shed a tear

over their graves, as you have done over his?"

"That may be very fine as a sentiment," remarked Travers, "but, in point of sensation, I had rather be a live Lord Derby than ten dead Maginns, with all the tears of Niobe as compensation."

They moved along as he spoke, and Annie found herself walking with Harrifield, who now showed no trace of low spirits, but was unusually animated. All his cares vanished in her presence. He felt as if he were relieved of a dead weight, the nature of which he had not scrutinised—on which he shut his eyes, indeed, but which had pressed him to the earth. So his heart took a bound, his thoughts kindled, and his words flashed; and Annie seemed to catch his fire. But this was only for a moment. Suddenly she became grave, even nervous, and cast an anxious look back. The church, rising like a screen, hid her mother and Travers from view, and she stood alone with Harrifield.

"Let me speak to you," he said, as

she was retracing her steps, and he gently seized her hand. "Do not take from me the opportunity which fortune, usually so unkind to me, has given."

It was touching to hear his voice, just before so cheerful, fall into this supplicatory tone, and Annie quivered at the allusion to his fortunes, which she knew had suffered severely. Yet she, too, seemed to plead, as she raised her eye, like an orb of gold aflow with light, the light of her soul; and as he glanced at her face, so brilliant in hue, so fair in feature, and so varying in expression —as he took in her form, with its lines of grace, and wave of motion, he feared to proceed, lest this vision of beauty should vanish at his words. Those words were to ascertain whether he might claim it as his own, or whether he must resign it for ever.

Often had Harrifield played the lover, and his success might nerve him for any venture, and, in fact, he had, as has been shown, whispered his vows to Annie herself again and again. But all his confidence deserted him at this moment. The man of

the world now faltered before this innocent girl, who showed no coquetry, who was exposed to all his arts, but whose feelings, though they coloured her every look, he could not read. Mysterious power! that can so sway, so transform, without itself moving —ay, without knowing, by the hidden magnetism of soul on soul, an emanation of our immortality.

“I have your papa’s permission to speak to you,” he said, in hesitating accents, dubious whether the fact might operate in his favour, or not—“his sanction for the proposal I wish to make. Ah, Annie! after what I have said already, can you doubt what that proposal is?”

Annie remained silent, with her eyes cast down, but the deepening colour in her cheek attested her emotion.

“May I hope? may I think that you listen to me with indulgence? would I dared to say satisfaction!” pursued Harrifield. “I have, it is true, little to offer you, but you are generous, and I know that you are not to be bought with treasure.”

Still she spoke not, but a gentle movement of her head affirmed her indifference to wealth.

“ And are you to be bought at all, Annie? —with the price few of your sex refuse, a vow of unalterable love, and a life of devotion! These I offer you, in this solemn place, and calling Heaven to witness. Say you accept them ! by your beauty, your tenderness, and your pity, I conjure, I implore you to consent.”

“ I cannot—must not,” Annie now replied, in a low voice.

“ What do you say ?” cried Harrifield, in a tone of fervour, while his face flamed : “ *must not!* You are still influenced by the silly tattle, which represents me as incapable of a real attachment!” Annie shook her head. “ Then, you think I am without an aim in the world, frivolous and inert, and given up to pleasure. I confess I have been all this, but I have it in me to be something better.”

“ I am sure you have,” said Annie, in the same low tone.

“ You believe in me ! then inspire me—be my helper, the prize for which I am to struggle, and which alone can induce me to struggle. This is my appeal, Annie—for my life ! Your answer will make it honourable to myself, and of use to others—will stimulate me to exertion, or consign me to inaction ; yes, and destruction.”

Well did he know woman’s heart, and what chord to touch in that delicate, exquisite instrument, and the emotion in Annie’s face, and the swell of her bosom showed what music he had awoke.

To take up this man, so handsome and gifted, and give him a career—to be his companion and genius—his inspiration, as he said, and lead him to what was high and noble, bringing out his generous instincts and varied talents : this was the vocation to which she was called. And her mind realised its import. She, as it were, clutched at it, and clung to it, in the tide of feeling on which she was borne, and by which she was overwhelmed. For the whirl swept her on. Did it loosen her grasp, and leave Harrifield behind ?

"It would be unpardonable in me to mislead you," she said, in accents mournful yet firm. "I am touched by your preference, and would do much to see you take your part in life, which might be so distinguished. I speak from my heart, Mr. Harrifield. I wish you every good; but—"

She stopped, not from any faltering of her voice, but from a sudden distraction, which brought up the remembrance of her refusal of Alfred, and carried her back to the scene. Words such as she spoke then, words of fate, fraught with unhappiness to another, and destiny to herself, were again on her lips! Could she make no sacrifice? Would she repeat her cruelty, to prolong — perhaps heighten, her remorse? The anguish of her hesitation was ended by Harrifield.

"You have indicated my sentence," he said, coldly: "let me spare you the pain of pronouncing it." And with a formal bow, he turned away.

Annie departed in the other direction. Her steps trembled, and her knees knocked together, and her face was fevered with ex-

citement, but, by an effort, she collected herself to meet Travers and her mother.

“Where is Mr. Harrifield?” asked Mrs. Blandford, as she came up.

“I believe he has gone,” Annie answered.

Travers looked up, but she averted her face: nevertheless, her manner, conjoined with Harrifield’s disappearance, raised his suspicions.

“I fear I must go, too,” he said, raising his hat, “or he is so absent, he will be rowing off without me.”

Mother and daughter bade him adieu, and he walked away, leaving them in the churchyard.

CHAPTER V.

EXPLANATION.

Mrs. BLANDFORD stood still for a moment : then she took Annie's hand, and clasped it fondly, holding it in her own as she moved on.

"Something has happened, dear Annie," she said : "something you didn't prepare me for, and, perhaps, didn't expect yourself?"

" You have guessed too truly, mamma," replied Annie, all her agitation returning : "*he has proposed to me*—and with papa's knowledge and sanction."

" And you?"

" He construed what I said as a refusal."

" I don't understand," rejoined Mrs.

Blandford, with a perplexed look. "I am sure, Annie, your answer would not be ambiguous on such an occasion, and to such a suitor. Yet you imply that it misled him!"

"Not exactly that, mamma."

"You did intend a refusal, then?"

"I intended to say I did not and never could love him—because love is a feeling not to be made to come at our pleasure; but I should have said also that I esteemed and liked him. And then if he had persisted—if he had pressed me, I—I would have consented."

And tears ran down her cheek.

Mrs. Blandford allowed them to flow in silence, and nothing was said till they reached home, when she put her arm round Annie, and clasped her to her heart.

This was what Annie desired; it was what she had missed, after the memorable explanation with Alfred, and it now saved her from the same despondency. Here, on her mother's bosom, she found refuge and consolation—for Mrs. Blandford proved equal

to the crisis. Such a sympathy had grown up between her and Annie, from companionship, and the devotion Annie had shown for her, that she no longer considered their interests as separate, or rather she only considered Annie's, ignoring her own. It might flash upon her that she would be more secure if Annie had accepted Harri-field, and she was still puzzled by Annie's indecision, but she resolved to offer no advice, believing, that Annie would take the best course. Her own marriage had been too bitter a disappointment to incline her to influence the choice of her child.

"I am glad it is over, and that he went as he did," Annie said, as soon as she could command voice. "I believe he would, after all, have married me, and I fear I should have broken down in the trial."

"Would the trial have been so great, Annie?" asked Mrs. Blandford.

"Oh! too great—too great, mamma!" sighed Annie.

Their eyes met as she spoke, and Mrs.

Blandford gave a little start, while Annie flushed to the temples.

“My poor child!” sobbed the mother.
And she fell on Annie’s neck.

CHAPTER VI.

AFTER.

TRIAL too great! Who can say what is beyond his strength? It is asserted that if each of us could scan the internal structure of his body, with its weak parts and the slight threads which sustain life, we should be afraid to move, lest the delicate fabric should be put out of joint. But, not knowing whereof we are made, we gorge, and swill, and smoke, and riot, and the body drags on for threescore and ten, as if it passed the time in lavender. And there is the same capacity of endurance in the spirit, or what is termed the heart. Though the spirit is as Ariel to the Caliban of the body, it will bear as great a strain,

and share the burden of the body in addition. Look out on those who are born to affliction—the blind and the crippled, who see nothing of the beauty of life, and taste none of its enjoyments, but only bear its rubs—mark the drudge at his toil, the captive in his dungeon, and the slave at his chain—nay, behold those who voluntarily devote themselves to a career of hardship under some inspiration of fanaticism or benevolence; and, considering that all these share besides the sorrows and aches common to humanity, may not some of us feel ashamed of our repinings? If we are disappointed, who is without disappointment? if we are afflicted, who is there that does not feel tribulation in some shape? and if we are left alone in the world, who is there to whom the world is a satisfaction at the last?

The trial Annie found now to be too great she had faced—only for an instant, indeed, and in imagination, but with appreciation of its nature. She knew that it meant a lifelong servitude to a man she

did not love, though she thought him worthy of love, and thought, moreover, that he would justify her devotion. All at once, she had felt a superstitious shrinking from her intention to refuse Harrifield, regarding this second offer of marriage as fate, which could not be avoided. How different from the love of her dreams, in which heart bounded to heart, and being merged in being ! Here she must content herself with seeing her life a bondage to another, its whole aim that other's exaltation, and its only pleasure to minister to his. The impulse to this course, or infatuation, whichever it might be, seized her as she was speaking, and left her no option but to yield, when Harrifield, by his interruption, broke the spell. She recoiled as from a precipice, with her mind still fixed on the abyss, and the ground seeming still to tremble under her feet.

Yet not this panic was it that made her unhappy—that kept her awake half the night, and broke in on her sleep. All that excitement of the imagination subsided, and

what she now suffered was from the heart. She turned from side to side on her bed, with every moment and every thought, her body sharing the inward fever, consuming in its flame, or vibrating with its thrills. Her restlessness showed nothing of the vehemence of passion, but was none the less poignant for being subdued, for enduring instead of resisting—and only now and then a tear escaped from her eye, or a sigh from her lips, to betray the intensity of her suffering. Did this anguish spring from disappointment, remorse, or apprehension? It might be caused by any or all of these, but whether or not was a mystery.

Sleep allayed the transport. In the morning she appeared at breakfast in her usual serenity, her face not looking so bright, perhaps, under its veil of sentiment, but showing no disquietude. Mrs. Blandford was grave. During the night she had been haunted by the apprehension of the displeasure of her husband when he heard of the failure of his project—for, though not over-gifted with penetration, in this case

she jumped to the right conclusion, knowing the turn of her husband's ambition, and thus understanding that Harrifield's proposal not only had his sanction, but that he had in some way brought it about. Still, she felt no desire to influence Annie ; hence she avoided the subject, deciding to leave the evil till it came.

"One thing I forgot to mention to you, Annie," she said, when they had finished breakfast. "Did you miss anything after my departure from Surbiton?"

"Oh, yes, mamma!" cried Annie, eagerly. "Have you got it?—the desk you gave me! It has made me so—so anxious!"

"Why should it do that, dear?"

Annie coloured.

Mrs. Blandford went into the adjoining room, whence she reappeared with the desk, and set it down on the table.

"I haven't looked in it, dear," she said ; "but I am afraid your papa has, though I hope he wouldn't read any letters addressed to you."

"That isn't what I was troubled about, mamma," replied Annie.

With nervous haste she opened the desk, touched the spring of the secret panel, and disclosed the recess beneath. There, undisturbed, lay the letter to which she attached such importance, and which involved such mystery.

"Safe! safe!" she exclaimed, joyfully. "I must show you this now, mamma. Forgive me for not speaking to you about it before, but I feared to grieve you in some way, and, perhaps, it is nothing, after all—nothing but what you know."

Mrs. Blandford took the letter, starting a little as she recognised the writing, and then turning to the address. This excited her more, and she rushed through the letter, holding her breath as she read.

"This is very extraordinary," she said; "it quite mystifies me."

"You can throw no light upon it, then, mamma," rejoined Annie, in a disappointed tone.

"None—only it reminds me of some

words I overheard when a child, which have since come into my mind very often, and which I could never explain to myself. And the speakers were these same persons—the writer and receiver of this letter.”

“Do tell me what they said, mamma, if it won’t distress you.”

“As near as I remember, the words were these,” said Mrs. Blandford. And she dropped her voice till it became almost inaudible.

Annie listened with glowing face. “I think there is light here,” she then said, excitedly; “and taking it in connexion with the letter, doesn’t it suggest something to you, mamma?”

“Yes, something—but, I fear, it is too wild to be possible.”

“Then you have the same impression as I have,” cried Annie, with a gesture of exultation. “Oh, mamma! mamma! if it should be true.” And she threw herself in her mother’s arms. There, in a voice lower than Mrs. Blandford’s, she divulged her conjecture.

"Your opinion is an echo of my own," said Mrs. Blandford, "and such a coincidence must have truth in it. But how is this truth to be established? We can do nothing on a mere guess, you know."

"We can make inquiries," replied Annie. "The letter gives us the address of the writer, and there we can at least learn what was known of her at the time of her death."

"After twenty years?—for it is that time since she died."

"That is against us, but people in the country don't ramble much, so that twenty years won't have worked the same changes in a Devonshire hamlet, as in a town. In fact, I have already taken this step, mamma." And Annie explained the mission she had confided to Touton. "I wonder I haven't seen something of him," she continued, "but he won't seek me, until he either obtains some information, or finds that none is to be gained."

"Can he be the man who asked about you at the lodge a few days ago?" said

Mrs. Blandford, suddenly recollecting the occurrence.

"No doubt he was. I told him to go to the lodge when he came again, as it would attract less attention than coming clandestinely."

"But isn't it more likely to be told to your father?" said Mrs. Blandford, with a frightened look. "I am afraid he has spies about us."

"I never thought of that," answered Annie. "Anyhow, they can't mix you up with it, and you shall stay here, while I walk round to the lodge, and find out if Touton was really there."

She replaced the letter in the secret recess, locked the desk, and went off for her hat. Mrs. Blandford stood at the window to see her pass, but nearly half an hour elapsed before Annie appeared, when she sauntered by, with a reassuring nod. Her face clouded next moment, as she saw Touton coming along the path, in company with her maid Burton.

The girl stepped in advance, on seeing

Annie. "I wished him to enter by the private door, miss," she said in a confidential tone, "but he would go to the lodge. However, I ran on before, and managed to let him in unseen."

"And why did you do this, pray?" replied Annie, severely.

Burton affected surprise. "Didn't you wish to see him privately, miss?"

"Did I tell you so? or give you any orders about him whatever?"

Burton pouted a little, but curbed her temper, and Annie passed on. She was not one to have confidences with a servant against her father.

Touton, uninfluenced by Burton's movements, came steadily forward, meeting Annie with a turn of his quid and touch of his hat.

"A sharp lass that, miss," he said, "but old birds ain't easily caught. She is too 'fficious for me."

"And for me, too," replied Annie, now smiling. "But she probably thought there was some secret from your having asked for me, instead of mamma—for I suppose it was

you who spoke at the lodge the other day?"

"Yes, miss. I got back *yonder*,"—Tou-ton alluded to the nameless Doctors' Commons—"a month ago, but I hadn't a chance to run down here before last week, unless I'd picked out a Sunday, and that isn't a day for business, you know. Sunday's a day for going to church and Hampton Court, and seeing London from the top of Primrose-Hill; and I believe, down in the country, it isn't wicked to cart off hay on a Sunday if it's going to rain; but rain doesn't matter in business, and depend upon it, it's a bad business that won't keep till Monday. However, here I am, miss, and I have found out something, though I ain't got to the end."

"That is more than we could expect at once."

"Ah! you say so, miss, because you're reasonable, which, begging your pardon, isn't the rule with ladies—though I ain't going to say a word against them as I get my living by. However, I found out Cherry Cottage, miss. It isn't in Torquay, but at a

place called Watcombe, about four miles from there. And Mrs. Bailey didn't die twenty years ago, as you said. I saw her grave, with the date on her tomb, which this is a copy of—" he presented Annie a paper. " You see, she has been dead only half that time."

" This will surprise my mamma, for she heard of her death ten years before," said Annie, after reading the copy of the inscription. " Did you learn anything more about her?"

" Not much at present, but it is what may lead to something. Mrs. Bailey had a daughter."

" And is she living?" cried Annie eagerly.

" Why shouldn't she be, miss? In the will cases *yonder*, nobody's allowed to be dead till you almost brings their body into court; and this lass was well took care of, so she is like to be alive and married. It seems she was brought up at boarding-school, like a lady, and when her mother died, a gentleman came and took her away.

What I've got to find out is who he was, and where he took her to?"

"And is it possible to do that?"

"With a clue it is. You can find out anything with a clue, miss, and I never start without one. When I first went to the maze at Hampton Court, all them I went with ran about wild, some calling out 'this is the way,' and some quite the contrary, and they laughed at me for standing still. But when they got in the middle, they finds me there reading the paper. It made 'em stare, I can tell you, and they all cried out to know how I'd got there. 'By a clue,' says I. And that's what I must get in this matter, miss."

"Yes, but the clue seems as difficult to obtain as anything," remarked Annie.

"Well, Mrs. Bailey was maintained by some gentleman of fortune, and no doubt it was this gentleman who paid for the daughter's education, and finally took her away. Now did you ever hear of anybody—any gentleman—who showed her kindness?"

"Only my papa," answered Annie, with pale lips.

"And it was your papa who said she was dead twenty years ago," resumed Touton.

Annie did not speak.

"Never mind, miss," pursued Touton.
"I've got a clue now."

He touched his hat; and Annie, partly from agitation, and partly because she knew not what to say, allowed him to depart in silence.

CHAPTER VII.

MORNING CALLS.

AFTER musing a moment, Annie returned to the house, and reported her conversation with Touton to her mother. It excited them both, for both suspected the action of Mr. Blandford, but they agreed that the facts in their possession could not be known to him, if meaning what they supposed. Should they tell him their conjecture, and the data on which it was founded? Mrs. Blandford, ever fearing his interposition, yet regarding him with a certain kind of trust, inclined to this course, but it was opposed by Annie.

“At least, let us wait till we learn something definite, mamma,” Annie urged. “If

we told papa now, he would treat it as a chimera, and extinguish it with a sarcasm. I confess I should like to consult a lawyer, but it was too delicate a subject for me to discuss with Doctor Chowler, and you will have no opportunity of doing so."

"No," replied Mrs. Blandford. "I couldn't go to him without its becoming known to your father; for I feel sure he keeps a watch over me; and it is hardly possible to make him understand by writing. Besides his answer might be intercepted. But we will think of it."

And she seemed to take to thinking about it at once; for she fell into a fit of abstraction. Suddenly she said—"Did I tell you I had had a visit from a friend of yours, Annie?"

"Of mine, mamma?" cried Annie.
"Whom could it be?"

"Mrs. Mockright. She called here with her daughters a few days ago. They are leaving Surbiton, Mr. Mockright having bought an estate near here. I think of returning her visit to-morrow, if you will go

over to Surbiton with me ; and we can call on Miss Cottle at the same time."

The proposal discomposed Annie ; for though not shunning the Mockrights when they came in her way, she felt this was different from seeking a meeting, to which her position towards Alfred was an interdict. Still, she knew not how to refuse to accompany her mother. She remembered too, that she was unlikely to encounter Alfred, as they would be at Surbiton during the hours of his absence in town ; and she thought also that it might please him to hear of her visit to his family. So, after a moment's hesitation, and a little blushing, her scruples died away.

" Of course, I shall be happy to go with you, mamma," she said. " It will be such a pleasure to see Miss Cottle again, and I shall not object to take a look round Surbiton."

She was thoughtful during the remainder of the day, so much so as to be remarked by her mother, though this appeared only from her anxious glances. Mrs. Blandford felt, indeed, that Annie had too much reason

to be pensive, and, she repaid her devotedness by momentarily forgetting her troubles as a wife in the solicitude of a mother. That a character so unhinged could rise to such abnegation may seem incredible, but characters do not work by the rule of thumb, and often surprise by their capability when we look for their collapse. In the intensity of her sorrow Mrs. Blandford had thought only of self, but now that sorrow seemed to smite her child, she remembered that Annie had *not* thought of self, and all the mother—all the woman awoke in her bosom. The call upon her quickened her faculties as well as her feelings, and she displayed a vitality such as she had not known for a long time.

Annie requited this tenderness next morning, when she came down reanimated, and threw her arms round her mother. In fact, each found the other a consolation, and the companion she most desired. Annie grew more and more cheerful, and, at length, appeared in a flow of spirits, so that Mrs. Blandford was puzzled by her

vivacity. Nor could Annie explain it to herself. It resulted from an impulse within, which baffled analysis—an impulse not wholly pleasurable, even touched with pain, yet throwing the mind into a sort of effervescence. Her words creamed and sparkled, as it were : her intervals of stillness seemed the effect of constraint, and then the tones of her voice poured forth again—no, not like wine, but like a gush of music, that inspirited her mother but dizzied herself.

Thus she chatted till the carriage reached Esher Common, a scene so familiar to her memory ; and here, whether from the influence of this association, or from exhaustion, she flagged, and became silent. Mrs. Blandford approved of this rest before they paid their visits, so made no attempt to renew the conversation. Ten minutes more brought them to Surbiton, and entering the Victoria-road, the carriage stopped at Miss Cottle's.

The rolling wheels and footman's knock aroused not only the good spinster and

Midge, but the establishment next door, summoning to the window Mrs. Booles, though not till after a hasty correction of Bobby and Tom, who, insisting on following her steps, were trundled into the back garden. Miss Cottle's portal was opened by Midge, with untumbled hair, and elbows covered ; for the reformation which baffled Annie Miss Cottle had accomplished, and Midge was now the embodiment of tidiness.

"I declare you are a perfect picture, Midge," cried Annie, rallying at sight of her *protégé*. "Doesn't she look as if she had come out of a bandbox, mamma?"

"Nothing could be neater, I am sure," answered Mrs. Blandford.

Miss Cottle heard the voices, and hastened to meet her visitors, to whom Poll, aroused by the excited greetings, also paid his compliments, calling out "I'm going to scream ! I'm going to scream !"

"Oh ! pray don't, Poll !" cried Annie, hurrying to the spot whence the warning proceeded. "Now you must be good and

invite me to tea," she added as she confronted the parrot.

" Will you like a pipe ?" asked Poll, after seeming to consider the proposal.

Midge, who had followed Annie into the kitchen, could not repress a titter at this question.

" It's been taught him by the gentleman, miss—one of the two that's took the apartments," she said : " such a funny you never knew—never ! He's always at something. Only this morning, when Mrs. Booles was spying at him in the summer-house, he managed to get a cracker close to her, and bang it went ! Didn't she scream ? And when she run off, the cracker followed, as if it was alive, and you should have seen Bobby and Tom hollarin', as it banged about. But I hope she'll soon go away ; for the gentleman told me, she'd got a situation."

" He said a sensation, I suppose," remarked Annie : " it must be Mr. Travers ?"

" That's him, miss. And the other gentleman's as quiet, you can't think ! He hardly

speaks, except to ask Mr. Travers not to *abhor* him."

The fear of being bored marked Harri-field, as plain as the sensation did Travers ; and, though Midge reported that they had both gone down the river to Richmond, Annie became anxious to leave the house. She curbed this feeling, however, and rejoined Miss Cottle, with whom she and her mother remained nearly an hour. They then bade her adieu, and drove off to the Mockrights.

Here they were ushered into the drawing-room, where, to Annie's confusion, they found themselves in presence of the whole family, Alfred included. Alfred bore the trial very well, but this rather provoked Annie, than reassured. She felt angry with herself for being agitated by a meeting which he bore so quietly : indeed, she was disposed to be angry with him, too. But her spirits took a rebound, and she chatted with his two sisters, while Alfred devoted himself to her mother. Mr. Mockright, with more gallantry, found his way to Annie.

"I hear you have bought a place at Walton," Annie said to him. "I shall be so pleased to have Jane and Ada for neighbours."

"That's very kind of you, and I am sure you'll do them more good than any teaching," replied Mr. Mockright; "and the more they see of you the better."

Ada echoed this sentiment, and even Jane smiled affably, unconscious that Annie was the involuntary cause of the secession of Harrifield.

"You will find the country about Walton very pretty," Annie said to Mr. Mockright, acknowledging his compliment. "But you could hardly have a pleasanter residence than you have here."

"Well, it doesn't suit a Member, you see," replied Mr. Mockright. "Members must be particular; and, another thing, Surbiton is so danged full of solicitors, I can't spit out of window for fear of spitting on one, and having an action brought against me. Now, at Walton, you get out of shop. I have shop all day in the city, and I don't want to meet it when I get home."

"Of course not," concurred Annie.

Thus they talked on, Mr. Mockright laying down the law, but in an amusing way, and so interesting Annie that she did not observe that Alfred and her mother had left the room to inspect the conservatory. Mrs. Mockright sat up silent—indeed, she had scarcely opened her lips all the time, and she was delighted to find herself in good society without being required to say a word. At last, Annie thought they were making an unconscionable call, and, looking round, missed the absentees. Before she could refer to their disappearance, however, they both came in from the conservatory, and Mrs. Blandford now proposed to depart: so they took leave, and were presently seated in the carriage, rolling away from Surbiton.

"I daresay you thought I was a long time in the conservatory, Annie?" remarked Mrs. Blandford.

"Were you so long?" Annie answered.

"You didn't miss me, then? Well, I remembered your telling me that young Mr.

Mockright was a barrister, and as I was alone with him, and found him very friendly, I thought it a good opportunity to obtain legal advice on our position?"

"And did you explain it to him?" said Annie, colouring.

"I told him everything."

"And what did he say?"

"He would give no opinion, except that there was ground for investigation, and he promised to see Touton, and take any measures for us that might be necessary."

"In his hands we will leave it, then," said Annie, more composedly.

But she felt grieved that this trouble had been unfolded to Alfred, reflecting that it must either confirm the slur on her birth, or link her family with some new scandal. For such appeared to be the issue involved by the investigation!

CHAPTER VIII.

JESSIE MAKES A DISCOVERY.

ANNIE never suspected how much the mystery hinged on Jessie, nor did Jessie dream how close her traces were being followed. All Jessie's thoughts were bent on Harri-field, and the means she should employ for bringing about a meeting, and rekindling the flame of his youth. To have averted his explanation with Annie, by her stratagem of taking Annie out at the critical moment, was a success which encouraged her to persist, teaching her to rely on her adroitness for greater results. She now cast about for an opening for a further step. There seemed no means of attaining one but through Ravel, and she knew that he would

rather secure her for himself than assist her to capture another. But she must make what use of him was possible. Of course, she would endeavour to blind him as to the nature of her interest in Harrifield, and she must be guided by circumstances in respect to himself, rather discouraging advances generally, but not altogether. In short, she had a part to play—one more complex than she had sustained hitherto, if not more difficult; and she must not only bring to the task all her address, but all her powers of deception.

It was with this impression that she arrived in London, after spending a few days with a friend at Brighton; and presented herself at Ravel's office. Sending in her card by Flam, she was at once introduced to the lawyer's presence.

“I have soon come to claim your offer of counsel, you see,” she said, inventing a pretext for her call. “The fact is, the contemplated change in Mr. Blandford’s establishment will, as you may suppose, seriously affect myself, and I should be glad to know

from you that I shall be entitled to some consideration on the occasion."

"Surely you cannot doubt that Mr. Blandford will always show *you* consideration?" answered Ravel, in a significant tone.

"You have great confidence in Mr. Blandford," smiled Jessie, skilfully parrying the thrust. "As his solicitor, you no doubt have reason for it; but I am in a more dependent position, and the lessons of life have made me timid. Can I claim any compensation, when he terminates my engagement—which, of course, he will do on this marriage?"

"Marriage! I was not aware that one was in contemplation." And Ravel turned very red, beginning to wonder whether Jessie might refer to her own intended nuptials.

"Is it possible you have not heard of the proposal made for Miss Blandford—which her father has accepted, and which there can be no question will be agreeable to her?"

"Believe me, the news takes me quite by

surprise," replied Ravel, with a breath of relief. "I hadn't even a suspicion of such an event; for I imagined Mr. Blandford was reserving his daughter for a match of his own contriving, and which I wonder he has given up, though it was really beyond his reach. He must have been tempted by a brilliant offer—a millionaire, or the heir of one."

" You know best whether that designation applies to Mr. Harrifield," returned Jessie, carelessly.

" What! is this the marriage?" exclaimed Ravel, " Charles Harrifield is a pauper, a beggar! When I have arranged his affairs, he will hardly have a hundred a year to live upon."

The statement did not seem to disturb Jessie. It is true, she kept guard over her face, and even over her feelings, and Ravel had already given her an inkling of Harrifield's embarrassments, hence the truth, though worse than anything she had conceived, found her half prepared. But this was not the explanation of her composure.

Harrifield's ruin struck her as an obstacle to the marriage with Annie ; to herself it was an opening. She could share destitution with him, and be happy—such are the sublime illusions of love ! but, in reality, she could make his hundred-a-year enough for his wants, and provide independently for herself.

“ Mr. Blandford will find out his situation before the final arrangements,” she said, quietly.

“ Do you think he doesn't know it ?” said Ravel. “ Harrifield isn't the man to disguise it from him, if disguise were possible ; but, in fact, he foresaw it months ago. And with this result in view, he yet designed to marry Harrifield to his daughter. He certainly urges a sort of reason for the match—and a very plausible one, but it only excites suspicion, in his case. Pardon me, if I express a belief that you might throw some light on the matter.”

“ I shall not ask your ground for such an opinion,” answered Jessie, after a pause. “ I ought to feel complimented by the

omniscience you ascribe to me, but how can I understand the secret motives of a man like Mr. Blandford? You once hinted to me that there was a flaw in his title to his estate.” Ravel made a gesture of assent. “Now I must ask what seems an absurd question, but it is one you have suggested. Do you suppose the marriage-scheme has been at all prompted by this supposed flaw?”

“By that alone!” returned Ravel, emphatically. “Don’t you see that the facts may be discovered, and then the estate would pass to Harrifield, as the next heir?”

Jessie fixed her gaze on Ravel, as if she were entranced. “Charles Harrifield the next heir,” she said, between her teeth.

“Is it possible you never heard this before?” cried Ravel.

“Never!” answered Jessie. And she added abruptly—“Where is he now?”

“He is in a sort of hiding at Surbiton, till I settle his affairs.”

“So near wealth, and yet in such indigence! How cruel is fortune!”

" You pity him ! Surely you will be ready to do him right."

Jessie rose, with a dejected air. " I must go now," she said. " In a day or two I may see you again."

And, without further adieu, she quitted the office, leaving Ravel in a state of wonder.

CHAPTER IX.

JESSIE AT MISS COTTLE'S.

JESSIE locked herself in her room, as soon as she reached her hotel. She had expected her meeting with Ravel to lead to important results, but the discovery that Harrifield was the presumptive heir to the estate, upset all her calculations. She was like a traveller in an American forest, where the way is marked by a notch in the trees, and who suddenly finds the notch has disappeared. A track, indeed, remained, but so intricate, so beset with mounds and undergrowth, that, though it led straight to her goal, she hesitated to advance. To enter it was more than to cross a rubicon—it was to pass a gulf. She might go forward, but once in motion, she

could never return. And she must leave behind every association with the present, and almost the past. If she had hitherto been a hypocrite, she must now become a conspirator, and conspire against those to whom she owed the tenderest obligations. The vehemence of her love could not blind her to the nature of the act. She recoiled from it, yet with every feeling wrung, kept revolving it in her thoughts. It was like the magnetic rock, which the fable represents as seizing passing ships, drawing the nails from their timbers, and leaving them to founder. The idea in her mind, a rock in hardness, exercised the same attraction, holding her enthralled, and drawing from her breast all its ties—every scruple, and every better feeling. She, too, was foundering. The barriers of conscience gave way ; the waves of passion swept up, and the black waters poured over her soul.

For a moment she despised herself ! Was it to this she had come ?—to be without affection, sympathy, truth, or gratitude. How, she asked herself, had she lost the

innocence of youth?—or if not youth, of childhood! How had she become crafty, deceitful, and false? Or was she really peculiar in this respect, or simply a type of her sex?

Certainly the same characteristics marked her mother, and her mother had taught her that they imbued every woman, and could not be dispensed with. Life was a battle, and all must fight, using what weapons they could, or they must submit to be trampled under foot. It was a law pervading nature—the struggle for existence, extending even to plants, and traceable in the buried worlds of geologists. Women fought in society as savagely as the Amazons in Dahomey, only they did it in secret, and resorted to arts instead of violence. Away, then, with the scruples by which she was restrained. She must be the same as others, and strive for herself, working out her own destiny. Philosophy taught that we were ruled by necessity, not by a free will, and she felt the truth of the doctrine. Her will was impotent. If she must be the instrument of

doom, it was against her wish ; for she had rather harm no one. But the course was laid down ; events forced her into it ; and the instinct of self-preservation impelled her on. The act was not her own ; she yielded to the law of necessity.

Such were the sophisms with which, carried away by passion, she silenced her conscience, without reconciling herself to her design. But resistance is over, when we admit excuses for surrender. From pondering on the objections to her project—or, rather, from inventing apologies for it, she proceeded to consider what would result from its success. The prospect was entrancing. She clasped her hands over her eyes in an excess of transport. The fulness of love, sealed by possession, and crowned with triumph, was an anticipation which effaced every other feeling ; and from that moment her determination was fixed. Come what would, or suffer who might, she would espouse the cause of Harrifield.

The next morning found her on her way to Surbiton, with the intention of seeking a

refuge with Miss Cottle, and there taking measures to discover Harrifield's retreat. Fortunately she was cloaked and veiled, and kept her parasol low, or Harrifield might have recognised her from the window as she entered the house.

Though she was no favourite, her visit pleased the kind spinster, who warmed towards any one recognising her existence, and Jessie, under a sense of isolation even deeper than Miss Cottle's, spoke in a manner so subdued, yet so endearing, as to wipe out all bitterness. She even extended her complaisance to Poll by presenting him with a box of bon-bons.

"Now, what do you say for it?" asked Miss Cottle, charmed by this attention.

Poll, meeting the occasion as if he were a Poll in petticoats, tacitly declined to say anything, but, tipping over the box, scattered the bon-bons about his board, and then attempted the impossible feat of devouring three at once.

Voices in the passage diverted the attention of his mistress and Jessie. The next

moment Miss Cottle could hardly repress a cry ; for Jessie sank on her arm, clasping it convulsively, but rallying with a breath, she raised a finger to her lips. Miss Cottle complied with the sign, and did not speak till Harrifield and Travers had quitted the house.

“ My two lodgers—do you know them ? ” she then said, timidly.

“ Yes,” answered Jessie. “ One of them —Charles Harrifield—is a—a connection of mine. Owing to an unfortunate estrangement, we haven’t met for years, and as I am just now a little unnerved, the unexpected sound of his voice almost paralysed me. I wish I could encroach on your kindness to let me stay here to-night ; for I feel unequal either to going back to town, or travelling on.”

“ I shall be but too pleased, if you will be content to share my room, the only accommodation I can offer you.”

“ Thank you a thousand times. It is the very thing I could wish. Midge can go to the station for my little bag, and perhaps I

may be able to resume my journey tomorrow."

Miss Cottle would allow her to say no more till she brought her a glass of wine; and Jessie felt the benefit of this hospitality; for she was quite exhausted. Nor was she sorry to be alone a few minutes, while her hostess prepared her room, and despatched Midge to the station for the bag. So far her plans had succeeded. She was in the very house with Harrifield, and it only remained to seize an opportunity of presenting herself and testing the effect.

"I had a visit from some other friends yesterday," said Miss Cottle, on her reappearance. "Can you guess whom?"

"Perhaps, Annie and her mamma?" replied Jessie, at a venture, remembering they were in the neighbourhood.

"You are so clever! How could you know this?"

"Did Annie never tell you I was a spiritualist? Not that it required magic to understand that she would come to see such a kind friend as you, when she was within

reach!" Jessie wished to ascertain whether Annie had met Harrifield, but without letting Miss Cottle know they were acquainted, in case she should, as Jessie suspected, be ignorant of the fact. So she said—"It must have amused Annie to find our apartments occupied by two gentlemen."

"Well, they both happened to be out, and, as I never spoke of the apartments, she heard nothing about it," replied Miss Cottle, ignorant that Annie had received a revelation from Midge. "But you are talking too much, and I have now got your room ready, so I must have you go and take a little rest."

Jessie gladly assented, and Miss Cottle led her up stairs.

CHAPTER X.

ARABELLA TAKES AN OUTING.

HARRIFIELD and Travers, on leaving the house, made their way to the river. Both appeared to be in a rollicking humour; for the rupture with Annie had transformed Harrifield, not only rendering him reckless, but deadening his sensibility. His very disposition changed. From being extremely goodnatured, he became cynical, lost his belief in human sympathy, and, discarding his inertness, sought an escape from reflection in constant excitement. He was too intimate with Travers to keep him unacquainted with what had happened. Nor could anything more demonstrate the revulsion of his nature than his appreciation

of Travers's comments, which, passing no stricture on Annie herself, described all womankind as butterflies, without heart or brain, and actuated only by caprice, so that they were as often fascinated by a thistle as a rose. "Then they have no constancy," pursued this censor. "All they care for is spreading their wings and gadding about; and so they have no sooner settled on one perch than they want to be off to another. In fact, they must have sensation; it is their very breath and being."

Travers delivered his soul also about woman's vanity, which he represented to be as inherent as her sex, and, taking a hint from the fable of the frog and the bull, declared that it prompted her to swell herself into an angel, in which effort she usually burst.

"Her stays, I presume?" remarked Harrifield. "You are not so happy there as with the butterfly. I have always understood that the bursting-liability of stays arose from the strain of pulling in, not from swelling."

“ Talking of pulling, there is a girl here a first-rate second,” rejoined Travers, starting into a new subject at a tangent. “ She pulls better than any girl I ever saw in a boat. But you know her!—the one whom you thought sweet on Al. Mockright!”

“ Miss Chowler! I believe she earned the title of *Miss* there.”

“ I doubt if she cared a button about him. Anyhow she promised to go for a pull with us to-day. Where shall we take her to?”

“ What we have to be wary of is where she takes us to, or it may be to the devil or a court of law—for her dad is in that line. But I am ready for any villainy.”

“ Then let us commit the villainy of giving her a lunch at Walton.”

“ Walton above all places!” exclaimed Harrifield. “ It will be delicious.”

They found Arabella on the promenade by the river. She had, at last, given up Alfred, becoming as conscious as Harrifield that she had made a “ miss there,” and resolving not to throw good time after bad

by following him further. It seemed well, however, to keep this resolve to herself, as the avowal of failure would not only disappoint her mother, but furnish that excellent woman with a weapon of attack whenever they quarrelled. At the same time, Arabella's appetite for a husband sharpened, and she was prepared for any deed of daring which would accomplish the object. Such was the frame of mind in which she had encountered Travers, and she so entered into his boating-tastes as gradually to lead him to the present appointment.

They started at once, Harrifield and Travers each taking an oar, and Arabella steering. Such a crew carried the boat along, and soon bore them out of sight of Surbiton, where Arabella feared observation. Nothing now interfered with her enjoyment. The river was pleasant; an autumn air played on the rowers, lightening their labour; and, inspired by the seclusion, Arabella broke into a song:—

“Tell not me of the castled Rhine,
Nor praise the winding Wye,

Let but the silver Thames be mine,
For no stream else care I.
The Thames! the Thames! a stream apart,
It flows in current free,
An artery from England's heart
Into her depths, the sea.

“ Skim lightly on, the breeze before,
‘Twixt mead and woodland green,
There’s music in the plashing oar,
There’s beauty in the scene.
The Thames! the Thames! so broad and deep,
With navies in its girth,
Here glides as ‘twere a soothing sleep,
To renovate the earth.”

“ A charming ditty, charmingly sung,”
cried Harrifield, at the close of this outbreak.

“ I never knew a thing better done,” concurred Travers, addressing Arabella. “ You chose just the right moment, and the agreeable surprise gave me a sensation.”

“ Where did you particularly feel it, if I may ask?” answered Arabella, chaffingly.

“ In his heart, of course,” said Harrifield.

“ Now do be candid, Mr. Travers, and tell me if the sensation wasn’t in your teeth,” cried Arabella.

"I must confess you come very near," returned Travers, with a significant movement of his lips, seen only by Arabella.

"Yes, it was in his throat," remarked Harrifield. "Such praise of the Thames made him thirsty; and if the water had only been drinkable, and diluted with brandy, he would have drunk your health on the spot, an act of homage in which I should have joined."

"We will drink it in champagne, as soon as we reach Walton," observed Travers; "and I will propose it in a neat speech."

"Bravo!" cried Harrifield. "We shall have an alliterative banquet—Woman, Wine, and Wit, the three graces in W."

"If we could only double *you*, we should have a partner for each," said Arabella, saucily.

"Then, how happy my fate," exclaimed Harrifield; "for, as Travers has appropriated wit, I and my other self would claim wine and *you*."

"Not with my consent," cried Travers.

"Now, I am sure, Mr. Travers, you

wouldn't care," said Arabella, with a laugh.
"The idea!"

"If there is an idea connected with it, I am safe," remarked Travers; "for then not even you could prevent Harrifield from being bored, and he would leave the field to me."

"The field I might, but not the flower," said Harrifield, gallantly.

"Nor the wine, I daresay," smiled Arabella.

"Certainly not the wit, if I were so fortunate as to carry off you."

"No; for I should be careful to take Mr. Travers along with us," said Arabella.

Both her companions laughed at this sally, and they chatted in the same strain, till they reached Walton Bridge, or rather its forlorn remains. Here they fastened the boat to a post, and, stepping ashore, walked up the road towards the village. But now it occurred to Travers that they had better lunch at Oatlands; so he stopped a passing fly, and they drove off to that pleasant hostelry.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LUNCHEONS AT OATLANDS.

OATLANDS possessed all the resources of a first-class hotel : so our travellers obtained a good luncheon, with every accessory. Arabella was hungry, but found opportunities to put away her portion, without betraying an appetite. The champagne flowed, and all became hilarious, though within bounds ; for Arabella was too wary to forget the maxim of merry and wise. She knew the proper moment to withdraw, and remained only ten minutes beyond it.

“ I shall leave you now,” she said, “ and stroll in the garden. You mustn’t be long, or I shall be missed at home.”

“ And if you go into the garden, you will be missed here,” replied Harrifield, politely.

"We shall lose the loveliest of our three graces—woman," said Travers. He dropped his voice to add—"and the loveliest of women."

Thus he opened the door, and Arabella glided—perhaps it would be truer to say,滑出， not without a wicked glance at Travers, and feeling both very grand and very full, besides being a little topheavy.

The fresh air of the garden put her to rights. It left her cheek burning, indeed; for Harrifield and Travers were talking her over; but it cooled the lava in her veins. Her steps brought her to a spot favourable to rehabilitation. Tall trees, arching overhead, clustered round a plot of turf, and threw their boughs, like a sylvan aisle, over innumerable green mounds, forming a Lilliputian cemetery. She seated herself on a sloping bank, and read the inscriptions heading the several graves. Here lay "Fidelio," whose epitaph declared him to have been "faithful to the last;" there mouldered "Flora," pronounced "as gentle as beautiful;" and by her side slept "Oscar,"

the “truest of puppies.” Arabella had come into a necropolis of Royal favourites, puppies of every breed, and both sexes, whilom in attendance on the former mistress of Oatlands, the good, generous, and unhappy Duchess of York. But Arabella gave only a passing thought to the defunct courtiers. Her mind reverted to her two companions, recalled their compliments, and especially dwelt on the parting shot of Travers. She began to imagine that she had hooked Travers, and the belief set her in a glow, though this was a little damped by a remembrance of Alfred. For a moment, she allowed her thoughts to rest on Alfred, but she recollect ed herself, and again became practical. No one obtained their first love, she reflected, and, since she was not to have Alfred, she must take somebody else. Travers, however, was not yet caught ; he was not even in love, but only moved by what is called a sneaking kindness, and whether he would be eventually landed in church, depended on her management.

She was so absorbed by her reflections,

that she did not observe Travers approaching.

"How you startled me!" she exclaimed, as he appeared. "*It quite gave me a sensation.*"

"Not a disagreeable one, I hope," replied Travers, amused.

"I won't make you vain by saying," rejoined Arabella, with an encouraging glance.

"Make me happy by saying—by telling me I am welcome."

"Much you would care!" Here Arabella gave a little sigh. "I know you and Mr. Harrifield have been talking about me, while you finished your wine."

"I must confess we have."

"You confess it—you, too! I really didn't expect it from you, Mr. Travers. Now tell me candidly what you said."

"Am I to repeat the whole speech?"

"What speech?"

"Don't you remember that I pledged myself to propose your health? Well, of course I made a speech."

Arabella was reassured by this announcement, and laughed.

"I hope it was a pretty one, and that you said nothing against me," she observed, in a tender tone.

"I say against you! Now do you think I would? tell me *that*."

"I *hope* you wouldn't. But what *did* you say?"

"Well, it was short, because Harrifield gets bored by anything long. He likes the epigrammatic, you know; so I put it thus—*she is a stunner, awfully pretty, and a devil for a lark; and here's her health!*"

"You naughty man to use such wicked words," laughed Arabella. "There please help me up, for I see Mr. Harrifield coming." She held out her hand, and Travers assisted her to rise, when she allowed her palm to remain in his clasp till she straightened her dress with its fellow, giving him a look as she drew it away.

"You have found a pretty retreat," cried Harrifield, as he came up: "the Duchess's charnel-house, where she shed tears over

her dogs, and laughed at the bad jokes of Monk Lewis."

"How do you know they were such bad jokes?" said Arabella.

"I infer it from his bad stories."

"Then you have read his stories?"

"I waded through his famous one, *The Monk*."

"Now there you convict yourself, Mr. Harrifield; for I am sure a story couldn't be bad, if you managed to read it."

"The boring might kill him," remarked Travers, with a solemnity that made both Harrifield and Arabella laugh.

"The mere remembrance of it is depressing," said Harrifield: "so let us drown it in coffee, which I will order to be brought out here to us."

"Oh, pray don't," pleaded Arabella. "It will detain us so long, and I shall be so late."

This appeal was irresistible, and the two gentlemen agreed to go at once, whereupon they all returned to the hotel, and a few minutes saw them start in the fly for Walton.

The road was dusty, and when they reached Walton, the village-green looked so refreshing, that Arabella proposed to alight, and pursue their way to the river on foot. The stoppage attracted some children, one of whom carried a wreath of roses, which, while Travers attended to the descent of Arabella, she offered to Harrifield. With his old good-nature, he patted her cheek, slipped a piece of silver in her hand, and accepted the present, walking on without showing it to his companions. Thus they approached the church, when Travers, observing that the door stood open, asked Arabella if she would like to go in, and see the Scolds' Bridle.

"First tell me what it is—what it means," said Arabella, merrily.

"Well," explained Travers, "it is intended for the unruly member."

"That must be your friend Mr. De Jonnes, whom I met at Folkestone," rejoined Arabella.

"Oh! what he wants is a Bores' Bridle," observed Harrifield, "and unfortunately nothing can be invented to bridle a bore."

"No," said Arabella. "Men will take care of that. You want to deprive *us* of speech, but you are never tired of talking yourselves."

"We get tired of listening, though," remarked Harrifield, "and that is what led our ancestors to provide this bridle."

"But they put it on the wrong horse, and so it has fallen into disuse," said Arabella.

"We sha'n't get a look at it, after all," said Travers, who had been scanning the interior of the edifice, "for though the church is open, the sexton has flown."

"Wise man!" exclaimed Arabella: "better to trust to wings than a nag with a scold's bridle."

The appreciation of her wit, and the tone of the conversation, aiding the effect of good eating and drinking, the whirl of the drive, and animal spirits, threw her into a state of exhilaration, and she tripped away from the church with the step of a *danseuse*.

"If this were a lawn, instead of a church-yard, I should be inclined for a waltz," she said, laughingly.

“Don’t spoil a good inclination,” cried Travers. “We can imagine it a lawn, and waltz along the path.”

“But there is no music,” replied Arabella.

“Harrifield will whistle. He is a capital performer on the windpipe.”

“Yes, you shall have ‘Whistle and I’ll come to ’ee, my lad,’” cried Harrifield: it does very well for a waltz.”

“Nothing could be better,” said Arabella. And she bent a soft glance on Travers, as she carrolled the words—

“Though father and mither and a’ should go mad,
Whistle and I’ll come to ’ee, my lad.”

“I’ll whistle,” said Harrifield: “and he can dance.”

He began forthwith, and Travers slipped his arm round Arabella, and bore her along the path—round and round, her head growing giddier, her cheek hotter, and her laugh blending with Travers’s as they whirled on. Harrifield whistled to perfection. His notes were as clear as a blackbird’s, and caught the fervour of the song, gushing out in a way that made half the fun. Truly, it

was a strange incident for a churchyard—Youth and Revelry dancing among the dead, while the air echoed the mingled sounds of voice, laugh, and whistle. In the whirl Arabella lost her hat, and called to Harrifield to pick it up, but leaving the hat on the ground, he placed on her head the wreath of roses, which he had received from the child in the village. At this moment his eyes fell on the wicket opening into the road, and there, arrested in the act of entering, stood Annie.

She confronted him like an apparition from one of the graves—pale, motionless, and seemingly lifeless. On the very spot where, only the day before, he had sworn constancy to her and called Heaven to witness his vows, she found him engaged in this saturnalia. He felt the shame of the situation, and could not have been more confounded, had she indeed been an accusing spectre. But this was only the effect of surprise, which permitted an assertion of his better nature. The next moment revived his sense of injury, in its utmost rancour,

and he exulted that Annie, coming to the scene where she had subjected him to such an humiliation, should behold what she did, and learn from it that he was not annihilated by her rejection. Annie hardly waited to form any conclusion. If her life seemed to go with one breath, it returned with the next, and she vanished as suddenly as she had appeared.

Harrifield made no remark to his companions, who had been looking the other way, so were unconscious of Annie's visit. Nor did they now note any change in his manner, though he was really more excited, and spoke at random. They were, indeed, rather astray themselves, the dance having shaken them up, and driven the champagne headwards. Arabella began to wish herself home, and was cheered by reflecting that they would have the current in their favour, which reduced the pull to an hour. Even an hour, in the elevated state, was a long while to avoid being silly and keep at high pressure at the same time : the difficulty was to draw the line ; but she trusted to instinct,

and did not resent Travers's squeeze of her hand, as she stepped into the boat.

They started soberly, but with a steady pull, which sent them glibly on. Arabella steered, and shaved a barge in the neatest manner, venturing within an ace of an upset, and exciting her two friends to applause.

"Not that I would ask an *encore*, unless you are a good swimmer," observed Harrifield; "for it would probably be a capsizé, in which case I should go to the bottom like lead, and you would be drowned; for Travers's first thought would be to swim ashore in search of some one to recover our bodies."

"Now I should imagine his first thought would be to take our bodies with him," observed Arabella.

"Pray don't upset us under that impression," cried Harrifield.

"If you do, Harrifield will drown both you and himself to convince you he is weatherwise," said Travers.

"Then wouldn't you have a sensation?" exclaimed Arabella.

They all laughed, though Arabella inwardly resolved not to afford Travers this enjoyment through her steering, and, consequently, attempted no more achievements. Thus they came to the lock, and Travers called the lockman to open the gate, which he was nothing loth to do, but, owing to the condition of the apparatus, it seemed to be a case in which they must take the will for the deed. As this would bar their progress, Harrifield jumped on the lock, and went to the man's assistance. Between them they got the gate open, and Harrifield waited to see the boat through, when he thought to step down on the gunwale, but missed his footing, and fell into the river. He instantly went down, but caught at an oar, which Travers pushed out, and the next moment Travers hauled him into the boat.

All passed like a flash of lightning, and lightning could not have given a greater shock to Arabella. If she had been a little giddy before, she was now quite sobered.

"You are thoroughly drenched, Mr. Harrifield," she said, "and it would be most

imprudent for you to go all the way home in this state. Can't you stay at the lock-house till your things are dried? Let me entreat you to do so."

"A very good motion," observed Travers. "Jump on the lock, again, Harrifield, and I will take Miss Chowler home, and come back for you."

"No, thank you," answered Harrifield. "Why did you pull me out of the river, if I am to perish of boredom in that hovel? If it is all the same to you, I had rather remain in good company, and a pull will give me a glow, and set all right."

They let him have his way, and it seemed to operate as he predicted; for he soon became lively, and kept them both laughing. Thus they all reached Surbiton in good spirits. Here Arabella said adieu, and the two gentlemen walked home together.

CHAPTER XII.

THE OLD LOVE.

HARRIFIELD's clothes had become dry by the time he reached Miss Cottle's, and he and Travers thought no more of his misadventure, but sat down to a cigar. As they smoked, they talked over the events of the day, and Harrifield mentioned Annie's appearance at the churchyard.

"It must have cut her to see us," he added; "in fact, I saw it did, for she looked like a sheet."

"What could it matter to her?" said Travers, puzzled. "She had done with you, and you had a right to enjoy yourself if you could."

"But don't you see she believed that I couldn't. A girl who jilts you imagines she has doomed you to misery, and she goes wild if she finds you can be merry still."

"Really it is ticklish work, having anything to say to women," remarked Travers, in a daunted way.

"Well, one who can talk so learnedly about them as you do, and who is so versed in all their wiles, needn't shrink from it. Indeed, you showed this to-day; for no couple could have been on better terms than you and Arabella."

Travers laughed. "It was awful, certainly," he said. "But when it comes to jilting—"

"Why, then," interpellated Harrifield, "you must take your revenge if you ever have an opportunity."

Travers shook his head. "I couldn't take revenge on a woman," he said, solemnly—"a thing that I have petted and patted, that has made life a little jolly for me, and that doesn't, after all, get fair play in the world. I believe a woman is—"

Here Travers launched into an eulogy, which, though well meant, rather told against the ladies, but it did not reach the ear of Harrifield, who had for some time been in a dozy state, and now fell asleep. Soon his silence revealed his condition to Travers, who left him undisturbed, and started by the train for town, telling Midge that he would return at midnight.

Harrifield's slumber was troubled. Shadows seemed to pass over his face, as shadows flit over water, and cast a reflection without leaving an impression. A dream was carrying him again through his life, recalling his boyhood, college days, and first love, that hour of romance, which innocence so endears, but which brought no glad memory to him. Then, become a man of fashion, he was listening to sirens, or flaunting with flirts, or revelling at a midnight orgie. Again the scene changed, and paired him with Annie, but only to transform her into the love of his youth, and bring this phantom and Annie and himself all bound

together, to the verge of a precipice. Recoiling from the abyss, he awoke.

Not awoke! He must still be dreaming; for there, at his side, stood the same form, the same phantom, looking as he had just seen her in his sleep, and as he saw her seven years before. Jessie Balcombe, known to him as Flora Bailey, had in nothing changed. He rubbed his eyes, strained their gaze again, and sprang to his feet.

“Flora!”

She was on his bosom.

If time had made any change in her face, dimmed its bloom, expanded its lines, or indented the skin, twilight veiled the blemish, and the softer light of her eyes showed it faultless. He looked down on the long eyelashes, which seemed to enframe her soul —on her cheek, whose blush might be said to tremble—on her mouth, so small, so red, in form and hue and odour a flower; he felt the luxuriant tresses which her hasty movement had cast to her waist, and he clasped the waist itself. She was no illusion, and they stood face to face once more.

" You come to me as from another world," he said, at last finding words. " Where have you been, and why did you ever leave me ?"

She put her arms round him now. " Because I loved you so—because I was afraid to stay with you—that is why I fled," she murmured.

" What a reason !"

" I have been sorry for it since."

" With what kind of sorrow ?"

" The sorrow of a darkened life and broken heart, of tears, and sleepless nights, and days of mourning. *What kind of sorrow ?* Well, I had no joy : if I laughed, it was with a pang in my breast ; if I smiled, it was to mask my grief. How could I doubt you ?" Her arms entwined him closer. " Mad I must have been—mad, mad ! you would never have harmed me."

" That is saying much," muttered Harri-field, in a disturbed tone. " I am a man, and if a woman trusts me, I must betray the trust, just as a woman is faithless to the confiding man. We are deceitful upon the

weights, you know, and I confess you did right to go away, though I—I—”

He intended to say that her departure gave him a shock, which he had never recovered; but he thought this might sound like a reproach, and he left the sentence unfinished.

“ You would not have deserted *me!* ” was the reply in tremulous accents.

“ I say, never trust man ! I am villain enough for anything.”

“ Hush ! renounce those words. I deny and rebuke them, and will not hear even you repeat them. Charles Harrifield, what has made you thus desperate ? ” She freed herself from his arm, and sat down. “ Your fortunes are not what you think —broken and ruined. You are a rich man. I come to tell you that *Robert Blandford is illegitimate, and that the Holmes' estate belongs to you.* ”

“ This is an old rumour, pretty Flora,” rejoined Harrifield, putting back the tresses from her forehead, “ and I believe Lord Bramblecourt ransacked the earth in search

of proof of it, but none could be found. I have myself seen the registry of Robert Blandford's birth and of his father's marriage."

"Of his marriage with Agnes Selwyn?"

"Yes."

"But he was married before—*to her sister, and marriage with a deceased wife's sister is unlawful.*"

Harrifield's look changed.

"Can this be proved?" he said eagerly.

"Here is a certificate of the first marriage."

She put a paper in his hand. He did not read it, however, at the moment; for he was suddenly seized with a shiver, which rendered him powerless, and he caught her arm for support. This prevented his falling, and he reached a chair.

"It is nothing—only the result of a chill," he said, in answer to her anxious look, "But I do feel a little—just a little unhinged, and must give up this affair for to-day—only I wish to express my gratitude to you—my—"

"Say nothing more," she cried, interrupting him. "We will talk all over to-morrow."

"You promise me—to-morrow, and here!"

"Yes, I am staying with Miss Cottle, and shall not leave the house till we have met again. But I must exact a promise from you."

"You have but to command," he said, with a faint smile.

"You will yield more to my entreaty, so I beg you to go at once to bed. And now good night!"

She spoke in a tender tone, but left the room without giving him her hand.

He remained a short time in meditation, but then went up stairs, and found himself provided with a warm bath, which Midge represented to have been ordered by the lady. But this restorative did not save him from a feverish night.

CHAPTER XIII.

COQUETTING.

THROUGH the sleepless hours Harrifield was haunted by thoughts that burn. Remembrance of wasted years, and equivocal, not to say disgraceful acts, conjoined with the resurrection of Jessie and her important communication, to keep his brain in tumult. The poet says—

“ High minds, of native pride and force,
 Most deeply feel thy pangs, Remorse !”

and, certainly, Harrifield’s remorse was on a par with the breadth of his perceptions. He saw afar. He knew what he had done, and what he had left undone, and the responsibility of both courses. Are we different beings in the dead of night from what we

are by daylight? Really one could think so. Nor is the phenomenon inexplicable. In the day we are all material, engaged in action, or, at least, surrounded by activity, and living by the bodily senses; but night shuts out matter—the visible and tangible, and leaves man to his spirit. Our senses sleep, and we live in our sensibilities. What by day seemed venial, now appears revolting, and we tremble at the self-reproach it awakens. Our actions unfold their secret motives, which flash before the eyes, like fire-flies in a tropical forest, shining in the dark. But it is with a light that shows us our real character, and we discover that, however we may be tricked out by sentiment, we are innately only insects.

To his own mind, Harrifield's pillow was a mirror, reflecting himself in this aspect. He saw his own littleness, and tossed from side to side to avoid the spectacle. But it was a nightmare that, turn as he might, pursued his gaze, and finally oppressed his sleep.

This self-abasement disappears when the

sun comes as a bridegroom out of his chamber, and restores the ascendancy of the Material; for now we are primed again, and a dwarf considers himself a giant to run his course. And Harrifield rose with all the feelings of the previous day, except that he no longer felt the desperation of a ruined man; for he looked on Mr. Blandford's estate as already his. Nor was he untouched by the devotedness shown for him by Jessie. But the wakeful reflections of the night left no more trace in his mind than the baseless fabric of a dream. All his life an Adonis, the object of attentions from women, and accustomed to victory, he considered himself wronged by repulse, and in the present case never reflected that Annie had discouraged his addresses from the first. Wounded vanity blinded him to everything but the fact of his failure. Even the impression produced upon him by the re-appearance of Jessie faded before this feeling, and his first inspirations from the fortune he believed her to have placed in his hands was, that it gave him an instrument for humbling,

if not subduing Annie. So can disappointed passion envenom even a generous heart.

Travers did not return the previous night, as he intended, and Harrifield had breakfast alone. Soon afterwards he received a visit from Jessie.

His face brightened as she entered, and he placed her a chair, while she expressed solicitude about his health, at the same time remarking that his voice was weak and hoarse.

“ You are not equal to this business for a few days,” she said. “ You want rest, and a little nursing.”

“ Who can I get to nurse me?” asked Harrifield, assuming a disconsolate air.

“ You must have Miss Cottle,” said Jessie, with a smile.

“ Miss Cottle is very good in her way, and I own that I never knew anyone so attentive without being a bore, which she never is. But as to nursing, unless my nurse has the gifts of a Grace”—and he placed his hand caressingly on her head—“ I had rather decline that part of the programme.”

“ Then, take the rest without the nursing.”

“That is the physic without the jam.”

“So you will have neither the rest nor the nursing? You must, then, let me send for a doctor; for, seriously, I think you should have advice.”

“And seriously—which you know is not my forte—I think I am having advice at this moment, and though I dislike it as a rule, I don’t care how much of it I have on the present occasion.”

“Perhaps, you wish me to give you a lecture,” said Jessie, who was so charmed to find herself in conversation with Harrifield, that she adopted his light tone, falling into it unconsciously; while he, forgetting the matter at stake, thought only of amusing himself with a pretty woman.

“I should like it above all things,” he answered. “Let it be a lecture on spiritualism—for I know you are a spiritualist.”

“Now you are bringing up old stories,” retorted Jessie. “How was it you didn’t recognise me at the time?”

“Who could think of you as the veiled

prophetess of Khorazin? I should have known you directly as a witch."

"Without my veil, of course," laughed Jessie. "Really you would have been very clever."

"You had all the cleverness to yourself," returned Harrifield, "and nothing could have been better contrived; for you kept me in doubt whether you were an angel or—
—or—"

"You needn't say whom; for you told me at the time, and frightened me out of my wits. I confess it doesn't sound so bad, when coupled with an angel, but that is an addition."

"Say an omission; for I did not tell what I felt—what, though you were in a manner invisible, your presence stirred in my breast. So the angel's parallel is very appropriate, as we receive angels unawares."

Jessie drooped her head, and shaded her face with her hand. Her heart whispered that we also received devils unawares. But she was not one to turn from a purpose she had once undertaken.

"I am encouraging you to make pretty speeches, when we have deeper things waiting," she said, in a pensive tone. "Will you promise to remain quiet to-day, and I will go to Mr. Ravel, and tell him everything, which will prepare him for a consultation with you to-morrow?"

"I assure you there is nothing to prevent my going to Ravel this morning," replied Harrifield, "and I could not think of imposing the errand on you. You will be here on my return?"

"Certainly. I shall at least remain till I have seen you again."

She withdrew before he could reply, and a few minutes saw him on his way to the train.

CHAPTER XIV.

UNDER EXAMINATION.

WAS Jessie satisfied? In Harrifield's presence she might be; for this was enough at the moment. They were together. She met his glance and heard his voice, and both recognised her attractions. Moreover, her heart felt conscious of a touch of tenderness, in his bearing as well as tone, which, wholly engaging her, allowed her to think of nothing beside. She was held as by a spell, and borne as on a stream. What are the surrounding lights and mirrors and company to the maiden flying through the waltz? She hears only the music, and sees but her partner. And this was the situation of Jessie when in company with Harrifield;

for she felt the absorption of the waltz, and all its intoxication—the buoyancy, joy, and whirl. Harrifield's voice was the music, and she stood in the world with him alone.

But other thoughts came in his absence. This was not the result she had looked for, hoped for, and dreamt of. Where were the impassioned words and renewed vows? vows that, if we love, are sweet to the ear, even when broken to the hope. He spoke of her desertion, but he did not propose to bind her to him for the future. Nay, though she made an avowal of her love, her confession drew no responsive declaration from him. It was a humbling and bitter thought, and she reproached herself for so forgetting her dignity. After seven years, she had allowed her passion to be surprised, and to be divested of its grace, reserve. Was it so indeed? Disappointment suggested the reproach, but there are occasions when such surprises are potent, and not only take from love no grace, but add to its fascination. But she would seem to have

produced no such effect on Harrifield, and, consequently, had not this consolation.

Could it be that he loved Annie? The suggestion turned her to stone, stopped her breath, and started her eyes from their sockets. We know that it had occurred to her before, and plunged her in dejection. But now it took away her reason. It came as a Medusa's head, and was a horror, as well as shock. Since she thought of it last, her face had rested on his bosom; she had been enclasped by his arm, and had confided to his ear her unhappy confession. To resign him to another now were a thousand times harder than then. But gradually she worked round to a different view of his position, and her mind rebounded like a relieved spring. She became convinced that his claim to the Blandford property would be a bar to union with Annie, and that she had thus at least removed a rival, whatever might be the result to herself.

This conclusion awoke a kinder feeling towards Annie, a feeling which deepened

with reflection, and moved both her heart and conscience. She tried to escape from it by going for a walk, but it made itself her companion, leading her through paths she and Annie had threaded together, and where every step brought a fond recollection or a pang of self-reproach. Suddenly she caught sight of Alfred Mockright. Willingly would she have avoided him, but his movements showed that she was seen, and there was no resource but to pass with a bow. Alfred, however, so placed himself as to defeat her intention, and she found herself obliged to stop.

“I am so glad to have met you, Miss Balcombe,” he said, as she reluctantly accepted his hand, “and indeed an interview between us was so desirable, that I should have written to ask you for one, but for this accident.”

Jessie thought he was fostering his old passion for Annie, and wished to secure her co-operation. She looked round to see if the place was suited to a conference, and found nothing to object to. Behind was an

open space, appropriated as allotments to the poor ; in front ran Maple-road, and on its flank the meadows of Westfield-lodge ; forming a spot at once rural and urban. Cows were lying on the grass, and a haystack nestled under a row of elms, adding to the rusticity of the scene, while, further on, luxuriant trees were backed by the woods of the Home Park, on the other side of the river, and blended Surrey with Middlesex. A rustic bench, a pace or two back from the road, offered a seat.

“ Since we have met, let us sit down,” she said, availing herself of the accommodation ; “ for there is no end to the subject we are to talk about. Unhappily I can now be of little service to you in the matter.”

“ I am afraid you misapprehend its nature,” said Alfred, with changed colour—for he understood her allusion. “ I wish it were not so ; for then I could dispense with some details, which I may weary you by going into.”

“ Never mind,” rejoined Jessie, now welcoming the rencounter as an escape from

her thoughts. "I know these affairs have ramifications, and that it is sometimes necessary to be a little prolix. Only begin, if there is a beginning."

"The beginning is obscure," returned Alfred, "and I must beg you to understand that it relates to yourself." Here he paused to give her time for reflection: then added: "You know I am a lawyer, and in this character I wish to ask you an important question. It is for you to decide how you will answer it, but I tell you frankly that your answer can't shake the infallible proof in my hands: at the same time, I promise never to mention you in the business, if you will meet me in the same confidential spirit."

"You remind me that you are a lawyer," replied Jessie, in an agitated voice: "let me in turn remind you that a lawyer should be the last person to expect from a comparative stranger such a revelation as you seem to demand. You are probably seeking information about some claims of Mr. Harrifield. I believe his lawyer is Mr. Ravel, whom you

know, and you had better go to him about it."

She was rising, but resumed her seat, when he gently laid his hand on her wrist.

"My question has nothing to do with Mr. Harrifield," he said. "I am interested for Mrs. Blandford."

A light flashed over Jessie's face.

"For *Mrs.* Blandford!" she exclaimed: "then for Miss Blandford, too?"

"My object concerns her as deeply—perhaps more so."

"And it is—" she seemed to pause before she added—"what?"

"Pardon me, but I must first ask whether you have ever borne any other name than your present one," returned Alfred.

Jessie was silent.

"Because I am in search of a young lady who left Torquay ten years ago, in company with a gentleman believed to be Mr. Blandford, and who was then known as Flora Bailey."

"And what is that to me?"

"Well, her age corresponds with yours;

you are found under Mr. Blandford's roof, and you resemble her in person."

"What proof have you of this?"

Alfred drew forth a pocket-book, and produced a *carte de visite*.

"Her photograph," he said.

"You think there is a resemblance between this girl of sixteen and me?"

"An unmistakable one. Nobody can doubt that it is your portrait."

Jessie's lips relaxed into a smile, which, though mournful, showed she was far from displeased.

"Really you are complimentary for a lawyer—though a trifle inquisitive. But say I and Flora Bailey are one: what then?"

Alfred took from the pocket-book a letter—the same that Annie had found in the desk.

"You know that writing?"

"It is my mother's," answered Jessie, her lips now paling.

"Please to read the letter."

Jessie eagerly complied, closing the perusal with a sigh of relief.

"You see what your mother says," ob-

served Alfred, as she returned the letter ; “and when I ask you if you can throw any light upon it—if you know, in fact, what her statements point at, you will understand the importance, I may say the solemnity of the question.”

“I will not deceive you,” replied Jessie. “My mother never spoke to me of those things till the day of her death, but then she was very explicit, and there is nothing in the letter but what I can explain.”

Alfred raised his eyes to hers. “You know what is at stake in this affair?” he said.

“All that I know of it you shall hear.”

She was silent a moment, when she recounted the particulars, as she had received them from her mother. The recital evidently cost her a struggle, but she made no pause to the end ; then she charged Alfred with a message to Annie, and abruptly bade him adieu.

CHAPTER XV.

DISORDER AT DR. CHOWLER'S.

THE third morning after this meeting with Jessie found Alfred at the door of Dr. Chowler; and his appearance there, noted from different windows by Mrs. Chowler and Arabella, excited within a little commotion. For two or three days there had been an interruption in the friendly relations between the Chowlers and the Mockrights, at least as regards the female portion of the families. The breach arose from an indiscretion on the part of Mrs. Chowler, who, in her ardour for high friends, fastened on one of the Mockright circle, whom she met at dinner, and dragged her into an acquaintance. Adroitly as she operated, her overtures

reached the ear of Jane, always on the cock, and the next day she threw it up to Mrs. Chowler, at the same time hinting at designs on the part of Arabella. In short, Mrs. Chowler received such an affront as, to use her own words, she could not put up with, and thus seemed to have lost Mrs. Mock-right by jumping at Mrs. Noddar. So true it is that between two skirts we fall to the ground.

Under such circumstances Mrs. Chowler was surprised by Alfred's visit, and could only ascribe it to one cause, the attraction of Arabella. She believed, indeed, that Arabella had been on another boating expedition with Alfred; for the excursion with Harri-field and Travers kept her out so long, that, to excuse her absence, Arabella dropped hints to this effect; and the continued intimacy now led the anxious mother to place the best construction on Alfred's visit. On the other hand, the visit dismayed Arabella, who was afraid of being found out; and hence it was under widely different impulses that the two ladies rushed down stairs.

"Is Dr. Chowler at home?" asked Alfred of the housemaid.

Doctor Chowler! Could he have come to make a proposal? Mrs. Chowler determined to be the first to know, and swept into the room after Alfred, before the servant could shut him in. Arabella, however, was just as prompt, and hardly allowed her mother and Alfred to shake hands ere she presented herself. Her design was to avert the explanation which her mother sought to precipitate.

"I wish you would go and tell your papa Mr. Alfred is here, dear," said Mrs. Chowler, conceiving that Arabella's presence was unseasonable at the moment.

"Mary has gone to him, mammair," answered Arabella.

"Mary is so stupid. He will expect his pet to tell him this agreeable news. Now run away." And Mrs. Chowler telegraphed a fierce gesture to Arabella, but without effect.

"I hear papair coming," said Arabella, coolly.

"Pray don't hurry him," interposed Alfred. "I must, indeed, apologise for intruding upon you so early, but—"

"Now I mustn't let you be ceremonious with us," cried Mrs. Chowler. "And to talk of intruding, too—when we are so glad to see you at any hour: yes, early or late. I am very indulgent on that point to young people. Not but what I scolded Arry a little the other night."

"Now don't talk of that, mammair, pray," murmured Arabella, blushing scarlet.

"*I* am not going to blame Mr. Alfred, never fear," said Mrs. Chowler, archly.

This declaration of grace caused Alfred to blush. He couldn't conceive what Mrs. Chowler meant.

"There is nothing to blame anyone for, and I think you might drop the subject," pouted Arabella.

"I don't want to say too much about it," said Mrs. Chowler, with a genial smile; "but I like Mr. Alfred to know it has my sanction." She turned to Alfred, as she added—"These things depend on the com-

pany you are in, and I am never uneasy about Arabella when she is with you."

Alfred bowed, expressing himself flattered by her confidence, and, he might have said, puzzled too. Arabella feared he would be goaded to this step, and struck in desperately.

"I suppose it is useless to ask you to take breakfast," she said, in her sweetest tones. "You are all so early at your house."

"Ah, you remember our bad habits," replied Alfred. "I thought Dr. Chowler was equally early, and timed myself to catch him starting for the train, but I seem to be a little too soon."

"Only five minutes," cried the Doctor, entering as he spoke, "and that you may devote to a little gossip, if you are inclined."

"I am too much inclined," replied Alfred, "but I must defer the pleasure to another opportunity, as what I have to say to you requires all the time you can spare me. Are you ready to go?"

"Quite."

Alfred's manner gave no indication that

he came to propose for Arabella, or that he ever would come on such errand, and Mrs. Chowler bit her nail as he departed. The Doctor, too, felt sore, but Alfred brought him business, and he knew better than to quarrel with his bread and butter ; wherefore he consoled himself with reflecting that the pear would fall when ripe. Alfred, indeed, left him little time for cogitation, as he at once proceeded to the object of his visit.

“ You will be surprised to hear that I want to consult you about Mrs. Blandford,” he said—and the Doctor did put himself at half-cock. “ She found herself in a position that prevented her communicating with you, but she was able to state her case to me, and she instructed me to act in it in concert with you. It is a curious story, and I decided to thread it to the end before I troubled you about it, but I am now in possession of facts that seem to require us to move, and I think the best course would be to represent them to Mr. Blandford himself in a personal interview.”

"Possibly," replied the Doctor, "but the facts must be very strange to dictate such a step."

"You shall hear."

And Alfred made a statement, that brought the Doctor round to his view, leading to the meeting with Mr. Blandford described in the following chapter.

CHAPTER XVI.

MR. BLANDFORD BROUGHT UP.

BURTON, Annie's maid, finding that she could establish no confidence with her mistress, and being moved partly by spite, and partly by assurance of reward, lost no time in reporting Touton's visits to Walton to Mr. Blandford, in as mysterious colours as she could imagine. Mr. Blandford found her letter at Great Stanhope Street, on his return to town from Devonshire, and it seemed to him to elucidate a letter he received at the same time from Harrifield. Harrifield simply stated that he withdrew his proposal for Annie's hand, having reason to believe that she would view it unfavourably; and Mr. Blandford conceived this to

mean that he had discovered her to be bound by some other attachment. He was so suspicious of women, that a like conclusion occurred to himself, and he regarded Touton as a messenger between Annie and a secret—perhaps, obscure suitor. Such an impression would have prompted some fathers to intervene at once, in a stringent manner, but Mr. Blandford did nothing rashly, and, moreover, he entertained a conviction that more was to be accomplished with women by managing than driving. So he decided to first ascertain his ground, and then move as circumstances might dictate.

It struck him that he should proceed by making use of Lady Clara and Jessie, and in Jessie's absence, he resolved to begin with Lady Clara. But before he could carry out his intention of calling at her house, he was visited by Dr. Chowler and Alfred.

"The matter we have come to speak to you about is a very delicate one, sir," observed Dr. Chowler, as Mr. Blandford invited

them to be seated. "It relates to your marriage with Louisa Siborne."

"Siborne! Louisa Aymer you mean," replied Mr. Blandford.

"Siborne, *alias* Aymer, sir," rejoined Dr. Chowler, with what seemed a touch of exultation.

Mr. Blandford lifted his eyebrows, and allowed his lips to fall into a half-smile.

"The lady has been twenty years in her grave," he said, "and I hope you don't intend, at this distance of time, to charge her with petty larceny, but *aliases* usually imply such an imputation. At the same time, I will testify that she never changed her name till she took mine."

"Still, her name *was* changed," rejoined Dr. Chowler.

"Perhaps it will be better for me to tell you the facts from the beginning," observed Alfred to Mr. Blandford, in a soothing tone. "I am sure they can't be a greater surprise to you than they are to the other persons concerned."

"And pray who are these persons?"

"The present Mrs. Blandford and her daughter," replied Alfred.

"In fact, our clients," said Dr. Chowler, imposingly.

"Indeed!" And Mr. Blandford lifted his brows higher than before, and smiled again.

"I should rather say our friends," remarked Alfred; "at least, I hope that I may appear in that character for Mrs. Blandford."

"I am sure I am much indebted to you for the interest you take about her," returned Mr. Blandford, pleasantly, "though, as you suspect, it is rather a surprise to me. But don't let me stop your story."

This covert defiance discomposed Alfred, but he spoke up directly, perceiving that Dr. Chowler was about to break in with an oration.

"I will make the statement as clear as I can," he said, with a conciliatory air. "You are aware that Louisa Aymer, the mother of the two Mrs. Blandfords, was an only child, but you may not know that this circumstance determined her father to marry her

to her cousin, Edward Aymer, in order to keep her property in the family."

"Without impugning your superior information, I imagine that I know as much of that transaction as yourself," rejoined Mr. Blandford.

Alfred bent his head. "Still, it is necessary for me to say that the young lady had formed a secret attachment for Captain Siborne, which ended in a secret marriage, and this union is attested by this certificate." He handed a paper to Mr. Blandford, who read it with widened eyes. "Soon afterwards, Captain Siborne was ordered to India, where, within six months, he fell in battle. Meanwhile, his widow privately became a mother, and here is evidence"—he handed Mr. Blandford another certificate—"that the child was christened Louisa Siborne."

"I think you will admit this is conclusive, sir," observed Dr. Chowler, oracularly.

"I admit nothing," returned Mr. Blandford, with his usual benignant air.

"I have something more to say, sir," pursued Alfred. "The lady judged it prudent

that her father should remain ignorant both of the birth and marriage, and, as discovery was imminent, she made a confidante of her cousin. The result was, that she and her cousin were married, in her father's presence; her cousin adopted the child, and she was brought up as his own. But, in point of fact, she was only half-sister to the present Mrs. Blandford, whose marriage with you, therefore, is open to no question."

"It is an unimpeachable marriage by the law and the canon," observed Dr. Chowler.

"I confess you make it appear so," rejoined Mr. Blandford, "and I shall be glad if it can be established without our going into a court of law. My only wish is to do right in the matter."

"I am bound to say that this was Mrs. Blandford's conviction," replied Alfred; "and, knowing her sentiments, I hand you over duplicates of the certificates, and a statement of the facts, that you may have the materials for a thorough investigation. Dr. Chowler has also drawn up a valuable opinion on the case."

"That I shall not require," said Mr. Blandford, glad of an opportunity to snub the proctor; "for though I have no doubt it is marked by the acumen for which Dr. Chowler is distinguished, yet the case is so plain, that it speaks for itself, if the facts are proved. I have therefore only to ask how you have been led to these researches, and I think this is a question I am entitled to put."

"It is one I don't object to answer," replied Alfred—"indeed, the answer is a confirmation of my statements. The inquiry originated with a letter, found by Miss Blandford in a secret compartment of her grandmother's desk. Here is a copy of it." And he handed the transcript to Mr. Blandford.

"An incident in which we may trace the finger of Providence," observed Dr. Chowler, religiously.

Mr. Blandford did not take up this challenge. He read the letter unmoved, and, seeing there was nothing more to be learnt, politely terminated the interview. He al-

lowed the two visitors to leave the house before he turned to the papers. Then he examined them carefully, reading each more than once, and comparing it with the statement. The case, as he had himself said, was too clear to need anything but investigation, and this left him no room for doubt. Reluctantly he admitted Dr. Chowler's dictum. Mrs. Blandford was his wife in lawful wedlock—by the law and the canon.

Since it thus became unavoidable to do right, he resolved to do right in a way that would give all the credit of the movement to himself ; so he sent for a cab, put the papers in his pocket, and drove off to Mr. Ravel's. Here his appearance seemed to excite what Travers would have called a sensation. Everybody looked confused, and Flam professed to think that Mr. Ravel had gone out, but found that he was mistaken, as Ravel, on being consulted, allowed himself to be at home, and ordered Mr. Blandford to be admitted.

“ I have come to tell you very satisfactory news,” said Mr. Blandford, undaunted by a

certain solemnity in Ravel's manner, and speaking with his usual sweetness. "I am glad to say that the difficulties about my marriage are at an end. I have had the matter searched to the bottom, and find that Mrs. Blandford is Mrs. Blandford, after all."

"That will be hard to prove in law, sir," replied Ravel, in a peculiar tone.

"I can prove it both in law and fact."

"You will be most fortunate if you can; for the case touches you more nearly than you seem to know. My letter of this morning appears not to have reached you?"

"No, it hadn't been delivered when I left home. Does it refer to this marriage?"

"Not to this marriage, *but to your mother's.*"

Ravel slowly raised his eyes as he spoke, but such was Mr. Blandford's self-command, that his face showed no sign of the panic he felt within.

"How my mother's?" he said, cheerily.
"What have we to do with that?"

"Before I answer the question, I must in justice tell you that I am acting in the affair

as the solicitor of Mr. Harrifield. Anything you say to me about it, therefore, may be brought in evidence against you."

"At least, tell me what it is all about," said Mr. Blandford, with the smile of innocence. "I suppose that won't incriminate me."

"My letter has given this information," answered Ravel, with more kindness in his tone; "but I can have no objection to state it verbally. It has been discovered that *your mother was a deceased wife's sister; consequently, that her marriage was invalid, and that the Holmes estate devolves to Mr. Harrifield.*"

"He must first win it in a court of law," said Mr. Blandford, complacently.

And, with these words, he departed.

CHAPTER XVII.

SCHEMING.

MR. BLANDFORD was hit, but not slain. His wife had been prostrated by a like blow: *he* was nerved to resist. Apprehension of the catastrophe had, indeed, been as great a bugbear to him as to her, and had haunted him for a longer time; but, unlike her, he met the reality with fortitude. He did not trace in it the finger of Providence, as the religious Dr. Chowler would have done; but rather began to suspect the finger of Jessie. It never entered his head to regard the incident as a retribution. He looked upon it as a turn in the game, which required him to review the cards in his hand, and play them dexterously. His chances were

desperate, but he would not give in till the game was up.

The first thing was to learn the law of the case. He had been in such dread of letting out his secret, that he abstained from submitting the facts for a legal opinion, but now, though his own judgment told him his position, he was impatient to take counsel. Where could he find a smart lawyer—one able to do a clever thing, without entangling himself. Strange to say, his thoughts rested on Alfred. He had been struck by the manner in which Alfred recited to him the case of Mrs. Blandford; and Alfred's youth, instead of weakening, deepened the impression. One who managed this business so well, seemed the best person to employ in a matter almost identical. Accordingly he drove to Alfred's chambers—rather a dashing place for the Temple, though the effect was ruined by a dirty floor. Alfred was out, and not expected to return that day: so Mr. Blandford left a card, and arranged to call upon him in the morning.

But the proper solution of the business was that which he had himself conceived in the first instance—namely, a marriage between Harrifield and Annie. He was now in a position to put a pressure on Annie, for, in recognising her mother as his wife, he resumed the authority of a father. But he must leave this for the last resort, and first exhaust persuasion. Of Annie's power to recal Harrifield he had no doubt. The difficulty would be with herself; but when she understood her position—how her own, and his, and her mother's interests, were alike involved—she could no longer refuse this match. Did it not offer everything a girl could desire—fortune, rank, and a handsome and accomplished husband? What objection could she urge? Could, indeed, any consideration weigh against the object at stake—the family inheritance—not to say the family honour?

It was with these impressions that he alighted at Lady Clara Mullet's, hoping that she might still be used to promote the marriage.

His confidence was justified by her first words.

“What a pity it is that Annie won’t marry Charles Harrifield,” she said; “and put an end to all this disputing. I don’t know anyone but her that I should like him to have.”

“You are her best and kindest friend, Lady Clara,” replied Mr. Blandford; “and I come to ask you to use your influence with her—is it necessary to say with Mr. Harrifield, too?—to effect a result so desirable.”

“You still wish it?”

“For both their sakes,” answered Mr. Blandford, not mentioning his own.

“Then, I must say it is very handsome of you, when Charles is trying to make out that your father committed bigamy.”

“Well, I think he doesn’t quite assert that,” smiled Mr. Blandford.

“Mr. Mullet told me he did.”

“Mullet has made a mistake there. The assertion is, that my father married two sisters, but I believe it is admitted that

one was dead before he married the other."

"Ah! that is a different thing, of course. I never approved of Jacob marrying Rachel, in her sister's life; but there could have been no objection, if he had waited till Leah was dead. However, the question now is about Annie. I shall write to her, to-night, and say everything I can to persuade her."

"I am afraid writing will be unavailing. Your letters are so clever, Annie will be plumed into reasoning with you; but the same arguments from your lips will be irresistible. Let me beg a great favour of you—that you will have Annie here for a week or two, and bring on the subject by degrees, at the same time communicating with Mr. Harrifield. It is really for the interest of both families that this union should take place; for otherwise we shall ruin ourselves in litigation."

"I don't see what I can do," said Lady Clara, musingly. "I can't have Annie here; for to-morrow we are going to Torquay for

the winter. Doctor Jennings won't allow me to delay a day."

Mr. Blandford reflected a moment. It would be well to place Annie under Lady Clara's influence, till he could look round; and at Torquay she would be removed from clandestine suitors. In the meantime he would win her mother to his views, and ascertain also what had become of Jessie.

"I am afraid I shall seem unconscionable," he said, "but would it be possible for you to take Annie to Torquay with you?"

"Possible—I shall be delighted," cried Lady Clara, eagerly.

"How good, how truly kind of you!"

"Not at all; only say you will let her come."

"I will bring her to the station, myself. You go by the express, from Paddington, I presume?"

"Yes."

"We will be punctual. And what a service you will render us all, if you bring about this marriage."

"I shall do my best," said Lady Clara,

giving him her hand ; “and I will stir up papa, too ; for he also thinks it would be a good thing.”

“Then we shall succeed,” said Mr. Blandford. And he left the house in good spirits.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DELIVERANCE.

ALFRED was not absent from his chambers without reason. He thought it behoved him to report his proceedings to Mrs. Blandford, as soon as he had communicated with her husband ; and, parting from Dr. Chowler, he took the train for Walton. It cannot be said that he undertook the errand with pleasure ; for he shrank from the appearance of obtruding on Annie, yet he did feel a satisfaction in going to announce that he had righted both Annie and her mother. This success gave him a credential, as it were—a testimony to Annie, that he possessed capabilities, though he made no pretension to be brilliant.

Moreover he had ceased to be a snob. That a snob should shed his husk may seem an impossibility, inasmuch as such a result must proceed from a change within, as well as without, and involves an abdication of our natural self. For every Englishman is a snob at some period of his life ; and it is the discipline of years—either the experience of sorrows and disappointments and reverses, or a wide communion with mankind, that converts a proportion into gentlemen. Alfred owed his regeneration to love—that missionary, of whom it is said by Terence, that “a man may be so changed by love, that one could not recognise him to be the same person.” Alfred had not only dropped all assumption ; he had become humble : and, surely, the Apostle’s injunction to us to be “clothed with humility,” indicates the garb of a gentleman no less than of a Christian. Love taught Alfred that the accidents of wealth or station do not confer merit—that whatever deference they win outwardly, a man’s stature is really measured by what he accomplishes ;

and seeing himself in a position of vantage by chance, while he recognised all men as equal, his heart opened to those who had received fewer gifts, or were heavier weighted. He ran into no enthusiasm, but he sought to be of use in the world, practising not merely courtesy, but kindness ; and while he was always ready with good offices, he did not button up his pocket.

Nor was it only in mind that Alfred had gained ; he had improved in appearance. His face had lost its merry look, but with this disappeared also its boyishness, and the graver impress was both more manly and more becoming. His features were agreeable, though irregular ; and defects found a cover under his clear grey eyes and ruddy complexion. The training of a volunteer had got him out of the slouch of the boatman, and though he lacked the patrician air of Harrifield, he stood and moved freely.

Mrs. Blandford was alone, and received him kindly, though in fear and trembling ; for, as already shown, she believed herself to be surrounded by spies. Alfred's news,

however, left her room for no feeling but joy. At first, she could hardly realise that she was relieved of the great sorrow of her life. Then she seemed as stunned as if she had received a blow ; her head dropped on her breast, and tears streamed from her eyes. Alfred murmured a few kind words, he hardly knew what, but, whatever they were, she understood their purpose, and she took his hand, and clasped it in her own.

“ You have ransomed me and mine—ransomed us from a yoke heavier than slavery,” she said. “ But I must go and tell Annie, and bring her to thank you. Ah ! there she is, in the walk. Shall we go to her together ? ”

Alfred would have excused himself if it had been possible, but he saw this could not be. Besides, he had a message to Annie, from Jessie, which he might have no other opportunity of delivering ; so he accompanied Mrs. Blandford into the garden.

Annie was walking by the river, and, having her back to the house, was unaware of their approach till they were at her side.

This accounted for the blush with which she met Alfred, and which her cheek seemed to retain in its heightened bloom.

Mrs. Blandford told their triumph directly. It transported Annie, and her delight burst forth in a flow of words, partly thanks to Alfred, and partly congratulation to her mother. Neither she nor her mother, indeed, saw any end to the theme. They talked it over and over, wondered at the strange actions of the various persons concerned, and wondered what impression had been produced on Mr. Blandford, forcing Alfred to reiterate his belief that Mr. Blandford considered the whole affair settled. Thus an hour passed in acknowledgments, responses, speculations, and questions, repeated again and again, and none of the party felt wearied. Mrs. Blandford was the first to reflect that she had had her say, and then remembered that Alfred deserved some refreshment, so she covertly slipped away, to order luncheon, and left Alfred and Annie by themselves.

They reached the end of the walk before

they found they were alone. The discovery confused Alfred, who thought how it would embarrass Annie, but Annie was so carried away by her excitement, that she seemed to forget everything but the present moment.

"I have walked myself out of breath," she said, seating herself on the bench by the river. "Let us wait here till mamma comes up—unless you would like to go indoors!"

"I would rather avail myself of your mamma's absence to deliver a message to you from Miss Balcombe," replied Alfred.

"From Jessie! But pray sit down; for I am sure you must be tired: indeed, you look so."

Alfred took a seat by her side: how he might look he knew not, but he felt as if the blood had left his face.

It had not left Annie's face. It stood in her cheek like a flame, but a flame of sunshine, soft, chaste, and roseate. Her eyes, only half raised, gave a light even softer, beaming through the long lashes like sunshine through foliage, and her rich chestnut hair had the same sunny look. Could her

thoughts have been seen—and seen they might be in the mirror of her features—this sunlight had also been found in her mind. She was enjoying one of those bright moments which fly over life, as they fly on cloudy days over a field, and which pass as unmarked and as swift.

“I ought to tell you,” said Alfred, not trusting himself to look up, “that Touton’s information led me to inquiries, from which I discovered that Miss Balcombe was Mrs. Bailey’s daughter.”

“Is it possible? I understand now why she always avoided seeing mamma.”

“Your mamma possessed her photograph, which she had sent her when a school girl, and this was given to me with the mysterious letter. But it is only just to say that I received from Miss Balcombe a voluntary statement, which guided me through the whole case, and that I believe it was dictated, as she averred, solely by friendship for you.”

“Still I can’t say that I am grateful to her, nor that I acquit her of hypocrisy.

How could she feel friendship for me when she suppressed facts so important for me to know, and revealed them only at the last moment."

" This is what she desired me to explain. She bade me to ask you to remember her saying 'Time will tell,' and declares that she always intended to reveal everything, if your papa had pushed for a divorce, but that she refrained from speaking before, as well from gratitude for his kindness to her, as from fear of offending him. Indeed, she seemed very unhappy, and I promised to beg you to think as kindly of her as you could."

" I can't think kindly of her—at any rate, till I have scolded her, which I shall do directly we meet."

" I hope it won't grieve you to hear that you have probably met for the last time. She told me she had resolved never to see you again."

" Really ! Why, one would think she was the person aggrieved, and I the offender. That has always been the way with Jessie.

I suppose I am expected to write a humble letter, entreating her to let us be friends."

"You know her better than I, but from her manner, I believe she meant what she said. And indeed I think you are well apart. She is a dangerous companion, and not the less so, from being so engaging."

"She would smile at your account of her, and I should fret if I thought she intended to give me up; for I feel towards her as Prince Henry to Falstaff, and could better spare a better friend. Not that I see any danger about her."

"Yet you have spoken of her hypocrisy!"

"And you have sought to excuse it," said Annie, raising her eyes, with a look of triumph. Alfred dropped his, as if dazzled by the radiance.

"The excuses were hers, not mine, and I simply repeated them from her," he replied, "though I confess I wished you to forgive her. This is why she is dangerous. I feel that she could make me do almost anything she wished."

"Excellent!" cried Annie, with a laugh,

which sounded a little forced. "But this is fascination—or rather magic; and now I remember she made you a medium at Lady Clara's."

"Was she the somnambulist?"

"To be sure. And you felt the magnetic influence."

"I can't resist a lady's tears."

"Now that is ungallant, because you imply that you *could* resist her smiles."

"Well, I mean to say that ladies are irresistible altogether."

"You found Jessie so," said Annie, tossing her head. "Well, she is pretty, and, as you say, engaging, and if she adds the charm of being dangerous too, and is also a spiritualist and somnambulist, and perhaps one or two other ists, which we haven't yet found out—why, I can't wonder at your—your infatuation: that is all. But I see mamma coming, and I think she wants us to go into luncheon."

Annie did not rise, however, but turned her face the other way.

"I hope you won't regard me as an apo-

gist for Miss Balcombe," said Alfred, meekly. "I am afraid that I have said more for her than I ought, but I acknowledged that she had done you and your mamma a great wrong, when I asked you to forgive her."

Annie looked round now. The little pique in her breast had already spent itself, and her face wore a smile, which Alfred indeed felt to be irresistible.

"I do forgive her, since you ask me," she said.

And here they were joined by Mrs. Blandford.

CHAPTER XIX.

EMPLOYED AGAIN.

ALFRED found his few hours at Walton winged; for instead of being the purgatory he expected, they were a flight in Paradise. Annie had looked so beautiful, and been so kind, and he had been so entranced. The impression even remained in his mind, after he left the house, and imparted such a feeling of buoyancy that, as he moved along, he seemed to tread the air. But this was sheer intoxication. He presently reflected that, in exposing himself to Annie's fascinations, he put an enemy into his breast to steal away his senses. Did he forget the incidents of his rejection? He had then asked her if her sentiments towards him might not change—if she could leave

him hope, and she responded by silence. Most opportune was this remembrance now; for it recalled him from his delirium, dispelling all illusions. It plainly intimated that he must look to Annie for nothing beyond esteem; and he reflected that it was under the protection of this understanding, that she had treated him with such friendliness to-day. But he could not bear the strain. It set him on fire, and he forgot everything but his love, and how it could be pursued. So he resolved to adopt the same resolution as Jessie, and never see Annie again. Circumstances, which had hitherto thrown them together, now rendered this possible, and it would be his own fault if they met.

It is difficult to form resolutions of self-renouncement, but to carry them out requires the spirit of a giant, and Alfred staggered in the effort. His old battle must be fought over again, and he shrank from the contest. There was no resource but to fly, and the flight must be from himself as much as Annie, and could have no goal but *work*, that Lethe

of the unhappy. Thus we commit suicide of the heart, swamping and stifling it, our noblest essence, while we shrink from laying hand on life, the mere tissue. Better to let the heart live, whatever its misery, and we shall at least remain human.

Alfred, indeed, was not so freed from the Blandfords as he supposed, and his surprise was great when the next morning brought Mr. Blandford himself to his chambers.

"I have gone over the papers you left me," Mr. Blandford said, in his mildest tones, "and I need hardly tell you that they have produced on my mind the only possible effect, *conviction*. I must thank you for releasing me from a painful trial, in this great service to me and my family."

"I am very sensible of your appreciation," replied Alfred, "and assure you I share your gratification at the result we have attained."

Mr. Blandford made a courtly inclination of his head. "The affair pressed especially on myself," he observed, "which renders me doubly glad to have it cleared up; for it

happens that a similar cloud hangs over the marriage of my mother."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. And luckily your tact has disposed of one case, before there has been a dispute about the other. I have just heard, however, that my mother's marriage is to be questioned on the same grounds—namely, that she was a deceased wife's sister; and should its invalidity be established, I shall not only be declared illegitimate, but be despoiled of six thousand a year. In this emergency I have come to ask you to take charge of my interests."

The communication and the proposal alike astonished Alfred, and he was silent a moment.

"Who is it impeaches the marriage?" he then asked.

"Mr. Charles Harrifield, the heir under the entail to the estate."

The mention of Harrifield gave Alfred another thrill.

"And have you any reason to believe that he can prove his case?" he said. "I ask the

question under the belief that you know the facts."

"But that is precisely what I don't. I know nothing—except that my father married successively two Miss Selwyns, and that the second wife was my mother."

"But were these two Miss Selwyns sisters?"

"That is the assertion."

"And how as to your own knowledge? It is necessary that you should tell me frankly."

"Of that I am too sensible, and I speak without reservation when I say that all I know of the matter is from my foster-sister, now dead, and who certainly did state that the two ladies were sisters. I never heard of the first marriage till it was revealed to me by her. I then searched at the church, and found the registry of it."

"Have you ever made enquiry for witnesses of the marriages?"

"Every inquiry, but without result. The only witness I discovered was my informant, Rhoda Pinkerton, subsequently Bailey."

Alfred recognised the name, but made no sign, remembering his pledge to screen Jessie. Mr. Blandford, however, showed that he had discovered Jessie's intervention in the present instance, though he had not suspected it in the case of his wife.

"I believe it is Mrs. Bailey's daughter, Jessie Balcombe, who has, for some unaccountable reason, set this suit in motion," he said. "She learnt the facts from her mother, and may have fuller information than I have."

"It is unfortunate that we don't know the claimant's strength," returned Alfred, thoughtfully, "but, from appearances, there seems no doubt that the two wives were sisters."

"It certainly does appear so."

"Still," pursued Alfred, "*it is possible that they may have been cousins.*"

Mr. Blandford shook his head. "Unfortunately," he observed, "*the father of both bears the same Christian name, James.*"

Alfred paused at this statement. "Anyhow," he said, rallying, "the burden of proof

lies with Mr. Harrifield. Meanwhile, you must challenge this proof. I shall be happy to undertake your case, and all that law can do for you shall be done."

He accompanied Mr. Blandford to the outer door, and returned to the office devoted to his cause.

CHAPTER XX.

ANNIE STARTS FOR TORQUAY.

MR. BLANDFORD had arranged for Annie to come up from Walton with Burton, in order to proceed with Lady Clara to Torquay, and he now drove to Great Stanhope Street, to take her in his own charge, as far as the Paddington terminus. Annie awaited him with some uneasiness. She knew not how he might feel about the validation of her mother's marriage, and she was distrustful about his projects of matrimony for herself, fearing they would be pursued without regard to objection from her. What resistance she had allowed herself to offer him was under a suspension of his rights. In impugning his marriage with her mother, he

broke the tie of nature with herself, and she was released from her allegiance. But he now recovered his authority ; the law pronounced her his child, and she owed him a child's duty. She could not, therefore, set herself in opposition to his commands. Her self-reliance quailed before the mere contemplation of such a proceeding. Yet she could never consent to marry Harrifield, and a presentiment beset her, that her father would urge this match.

Harrifield had so fallen in her favour, that she began to regard him with dislike. She could not forget his bacchanalian coronation of Arabella within so short a time of his breach with herself, and on the spot where he had almost brought her to sacrifice herself to him. It wounded her self-respect ; and Harrifield's glance, as their eyes met, showed that he intended it to have that effect. And this recalled the abrupt way in which he dropped the proposal for her hand. He had not waited to be refused. At the moment when she was deciding to yield, he suddenly retired, and though this was a de-

liverance, she felt some mortification in the escape. It awoke no resentment at the time, because of her revulsion of feeling, and because her kind disposition led her to view his conduct with indulgence. But the romp with Arabella put the incident in a new and stronger light, and she now regarded it as an affront, and Harrifield as a heartless man of fashion.

Such thoughts rendered her a little embarrassed when she met her father, but Mr. Blandford noted only her beauty, and, as his eye took this in, he felt that she might dispose of Harrifield's claims as she would. Prizing her thus, he took her in his arms. She had not expected such a greeting, and with some impression of having been a little naughty, she clung round his neck, and let her head droop on his shoulder.

"Come, it is all over now, and you must forget it all," said Mr. Blandford, touched by this burst of affection, "or only remember that we should never have guessed the truth, but for my movement. Now we are all reconciled."

"And you forgive me?" faltered Annie.

"With all my heart," replied Mr. Blandford, as if he were doing a generous thing.

"You will never judge me harshly?"

"How can you dream of such a thing? Are not you judging harshly of me when you think it possible?"

Annie replied by a kiss, which settled everything, and Mr. Blandford was a proud man, as he led her down stairs, and placed her in the carriage. But a disagreeable task remained to be performed. It was necessary that she should be told, before they parted, of the suit for ousting him from his estate, of which she could not be kept ignorant, and the carriage was no sooner in motion than he sought to improve the opportunity.

"All is bustle," he said, with a gesture towards the traffic in the street, "and all is vexation. As we get older, we find that Solomon was not so behind our age as we first thought."

"I declare you are turning philosopher, papa," cried Annie. "I hope you will write a book about it, and make it as prosy as you

can, so that it may send people to sleep. I promise the work shall be the solace of my pillow."

" You are very encouraging," rejoined Mr. Blandford, glad that she had taken a bantering tone. " But you must make a book of the world, Annie, and learn philosophy out of that. May it indeed bring solace to your pillow ! And I believe it will if you *do right*—that is, if you recognise that we can't always have exactly our own way, but should sacrifice even our dearest wishes, if they prejudice the interests of others."

" I shall try to do so, papa."

" That is my own good girl. And to be serious, Annie, if we are not serious already, both of us may be called upon to do this, some day. For now my marriage has been set right, there seems to be some flaw in my mother's, and the end may be that our property will be diverted to the next heir."

" Not to Mr. Harrifield ?"

" There is no other claimant. And it is fortunate that our antagonist, if I must use

the word, is Charles Harrifield, one who would stoop to no ungenerous act, who would scorn to take an unworthy advantage, and who wishes to *do right*. If it becomes necessary, one can deal with such a man. Indeed, I have reason to know that it will be no fault of his if this affair is not brought to a happy close."

"Indeed," murmured Annie, with pale lips.

In a moment she remembered the scheming character of her father, and her heart sank, and reverted to its former presentiment. She did not understand the new marriage difficulty, but she saw that she was involved in its meshes, and was to be made use of for arranging the suit. Did her father know what had already occurred between her and Harrifield, raising, as she conceived, a barrier between them, or was he acting in ignorance of this incident? As the question rose in her mind, she almost resolved to tell him the whole story. But she checked herself, deciding that it would be better not to precipitate an explanation.

They reached the station some time before Lady Clara, who arrived only at the last moment, and they were obliged to enter the train at once. Mr. Mullet was to have been of the party, and had arranged to meet them on the platform, but the bell rang without his appearing, and Mr. Blandford, on Lady Clara's entreaty, searched the terminus without bringing him to light. The train gave the usual quarter of an hour's grace, after the appointed time of departure, and he was still conspicuous by his absence.

"Do you know I am afraid he has made a mistake, and gone to some other station?" Lady Clara said to Annie, as the train began to move.

Here there was a cry of "stop! stop!" and Mr. Mullet was descried rushing along, accompanied by a porter, and followed by Mr. Blandford and his valet, in full cry. The porter opened the carriage-door, and Mr. Mullet was lifted in, just in time to be shot into a seat by the increased speed of the train.

"How could you make such a blun-

der?" he cried to Lady Clara, with his first breath.

"Now, Mr. Mullet!" exclaimed Annie, raising her finger.

"To be sure—it is my fault!" answered Mullet. "But ask Lady Clara, and she will own that she told me the South Western."

"I told you the *Great* Western," cried Lady Clara.

Mr. Mullet looked at Annie with a smile. "You see! the old story," he said. "Luckily I am practical, if ladies are not; and as I saw no signs of a train for 12-30 at Waterloo, after taking a turn on the platform, I made inquiry, and found the 12-30 was from Paddington; so I came off at once."

"And you had better say as little about it as possible," rejoined Annie.

"Capital!" cried Mr. Mullet, with a roar of laughter. "But I have saved the train, and that is all I care about."

Thus Annie started for Torquay.

CHAPTER XXI.

CHECKED.

JESSIE made herself so agreeable to Miss Cottle, that the good spinster pressed her to prolong her visit, whence she obtained a few days' scope for her plans. It was with the connivance of her hostess that she saw Harrifield, whom she called her kinsman ; and she stated that they had become reconciled through these meetings, which had thus taken a weight from her mind. She certainly became very cheerful, and, deceived by appearances, Miss Cottle believed her story. Perhaps she might have been sceptical, if her experience had been wider, but she had never been in love. It is the tender passion that opens woman's eyes to the knowledge of

good and evil, and both teaches her stratagem, and quickens her scent of it in her sister.

We know that Jessie had resolved to see Harrifield again, on his return from the conference with Ravel, and let his bearing then decide her movements. But, to her surprise, several days passed without his coming back, and she grew uneasy. At last, she determined to visit Ravel herself, and learn what was going on. Meanwhile, a temporary absence from Surbiton might have a good effect.

"I hope you are not going altogether," said Miss Cottle, on hearing that she had an errand to town; "for I think a stay here will do you good, and I am sure your company will do me good, so that I am rather selfish in the matter."

"You are never selfish," answered Jessie. "I wish"—and she spoke her feeling at the moment—"I could be as little so."

"Now I won't be praised at your expense," rejoined Miss Cottle, in the fulness of her heart; "for though you may appear cold

to some, those who know you best will like you best. You must promise to return soon."

"I shall be only too glad."

Miss Cottle went with her to the station, and Jessie smiled adieu from the carriage, as the train moved off.

In her isolation, she had appreciated Miss Cottle's gentle nature, and allowed it to impress her own. Such is a common result of companionship with a good woman, which, though the effect may be as gradual as that of the dropping of water on rock, influences the most hardened, holding up a contrast which is a mirror to our defects, and by force of which we are led, sooner or later, to accept this ministry of elevation. Nor let it be supposed that even a woman left out of social ties wastes her sweetness on desert air. Be sure that some one has noted the flower by the wayside, and bears away the remembrance, which, amidst the meannesses of the struggle for existence, will keep alive a testimony that there are more things in Heaven and earth than are dreamt of in geology, or cosmogony either. This was the impression

of Jessie, as she parted from Miss Cottle. She asked herself whether she might not also be an old maid, and if so, whether she could go through the same discipline of trial and come out as lovable. At the moment, the thought seemed like the seed which fell among thorns, and which was choked by their redundancy ; for it showed the necessity of marriage, and whom could she marry but Harrifield ? Alas ! she had now given her passion such rein that it bore her over every consideration—not of prudence only, but of self-respect.

In this frame of mind she arrived at Mr. Ravel's, where her card, intrusted to Flam, procured her immediate admission to the lawyer. She could not but note that he received her with more than his usual attentions, but she was now too earnest to deceive, and left the demonstration without response. He felt checked, but not discouraged, regarding her demeanour as a hint that he must advance cautiously, and he resolved not to hazard a declaration till he had paved the way.

“I said I should come in a few days,” Jessie observed, “but, in the meantime, chance threw me in the way of Mr. Harrifield, and I gave him the information you wanted ; I hope it may lead to his obtaining the Holmes estate.”

“He told me of your communication,” replied Ravel, “and I think there is no doubt it will secure the object—at least, if we are allowed to proceed.”

“Is it lawful to ask what can prevent you?” returned Jessie, with a flutter in her breast.

“Lawful for you, but for no one else. The truth is, Lord Bramblecourt came here while Mr. Harrifield and I were in council, and we were obliged to state the case to him. He took Mr. Harrifield away with him, and they have been talking it over at Bramblecourt Castle ever since. Mr. Blandford has been talking it over too, and the result is, that he has brought Lady Clara Mullet and her father to join in urging a compromise.”

“I should be glad of that, if it would secure Mr. Harrifield a fair share of the pro-

perty, for it is a sad thing that this should be taken altogether from Mr. Blandford."

"Well, as it turns out that Mr. Blandford can't annul his marriage, there is no longer much objection to the arrangement, as the estate must go to Mr. Harrifield at his death. Anyhow, the family seem to adopt this view, and Lord Bramblecourt has ordered me to stay proceedings pending negotiation. Whatever the result, you may be certain that I shall insist on a due recognition of your services."

"On no account would I accept anything," cried Jessie, excitedly ; "and I entreat you to say so, if the subject is mentioned. It isn't for the sake of money I have gone against Mr. Blandford, to whom I am under such obligations. I have had a motive, of course ; but nobody shall be able to say it was a sordid one."

"On the contrary, it is the highest motive we can have—a love of justice."

"Justice!" echoed Jessie, in a tone of bitterness. "Well, the end is just certainly ; and whether people will put them-

selves to any trouble for the sake of doing justice is a question we needn't discuss. All we want is a motive to the world, or, at most, a salve for conscience, and justice is good for both purposes."

"What other motive could you have?" said Ravel, perplexed by this outburst, and eyeing her curiously.

Jessie raised her eyes, and the lawyer saw such a depth within the long lashes, that he could think of nothing else; otherwise, he might have been enlightened.

"I have one here," she said, laying her finger on her bosom, "and there let it remain. Only lend your aid to bring about a fair compromise—such a one as will secure a suitable indemnity to Mr. Harrifield, and a provision for the Blandfords, and I shall be satisfied. And now I must remind you that you haven't told me what is proposed."

"The proposal is more for an arrangement than a compromise, and, in fact, is only what Mr. Blandford has all along been planning—a marriage between his daughter and Mr. Harrifield."

Jessie was speechless.

"As to the distribution of the property, I believe both sides will be disposed to act liberally," continued Ravel, "so that you will have no ground for regret on that account. The first thing to settle is the marriage itself, and for that the way seems to be smooth."

"I have no more to say," observed Jessie, abruptly rising.

Ravel proffered his hand, and she allowed hers to drop into it, but without knowing what she did.

"You will like to hear how we go on," said Ravel. "Where may I have the privilege of writing to you?"

"I really can't name a place at present," answered Jessie. "I shall be moving about."

So she went away.

Ravel stood a moment, biting the end of his quill. "She puzzles me!" he muttered. "But I won't give her up. Be she what she may, she is my fancy."

And he plunged into his papers.

CHAPTER XXII.

TIME FOR REFLECTION.

HARRIFIELD reappeared at Surbiton on the evening of the day that Jessie left. Miss Cottle thought he looked ill, but refrained from remark, in fear of being considered a bore, and he made no complaint. He enquired about Jessie, and seemed disconcerted by her departure, but still hedged himself with silence. To Miss Cottle's relief he went early to his room, and she hoped that a night's rest would shake off his apathy.

“I wish Mr. Travers was here, ma'am,” observed Midge, as they bolted up the house. “The gentleman and him is such friends, I think he misses him—and he is such a funny, too.”

"I wish he were here, Midge, and I expected him to-day," replied Miss Cottle, "but it is too late now, so we will go to bed."

Accordingly, they exchanged good night, and Midge withdrew to her room, which was of the same miniature proportions as herself, and equally neat in appearance. She carefully folded up her things and got into bed, but had no sooner laid down than she remembered an omission—she had not put her shoes together; and the training of Miss Cottle had so developed her organ of tidiness that, try as she would, she could not shut her eyes on her default. At last, she rose on a repairing mission, and was groping about for the shoes, when she heard a slight moan. It was a sound so like what often broke in the night from her mother after receiving a conjugal beating, that it took away her recollection for a moment, and she fancied herself at home, about to hide from her father. But she instantly rallied; and reflecting that the moan came from the adjoining room, ran to arouse Miss Cottle.

"I think the gentleman is took bad, ma'am," she said, "he's groaning."

Miss Cottle threw on her dress, and hastened to Harrifield's door. She held her breath to listen, and heard a sound that made her enter. The light fell on the bed, which trickled with blood, and she divined what had occurred.

"Run for Mr. Coldman, Midge, and tell him it is a broken blood-vessel," she said.

Midge waited not a second bidding, and her mistress hurried to the bed, and raised Harrifield up, holding him in her arms. This seemed to check the hemorrhage, but the check was only in appearance, as the blood presently reappeared. Harrifield moved his lips, and her bent ear caught the words—"Pray don't be alarmed."

"Not if you will keep quiet, sir," she replied, gently.

He made a gesture of assent, and she continued to bear him up, counting the moments, till a quick step on the stair announced the doctor. A cheerful, sympathising face, an air that inspired confidence,

and a voice that derived its kind tone from heart, not art, gave Mr. Coldman a diploma which everyone could read, and which at once calmed Miss Cottle. He looked at the blood, felt Harrisfield's pulse, and asked some questions, which the sick man answered. The doctor then administered some medicine, which he drew from his pocket, and ordered the dose to be repeated in three hours.

"You must sit up with him," he continued to Miss Cottle. "Don't let him speak, and keep his body on a slope, as it is now. I have reason to think the rush is over, but send for me again if it recurs. In any case I shall be here in the morning."

So he went away, leaving Miss Cottle in charge.

It was a situation to show her woman's patience, that Everlasting, which, like the chrysanthemum, blossoms in winter. Miss Cottle cared nothing for fatigue, and though she could not but be anxious, she kept her mind tranquil, or, rather, it involuntarily assumed this condition, from being occupied

more with what was to be done than feared. She not only watched Harrifield, she watched over him, so that he found her hand as vigilant as her eye, anticipating his wish to move, and now smoothing, now gently raising his pillow. Gradually he sank into a calm sleep.

Never was morning more welcome to Miss Cottle than the next. The light it cast in the room entered her breast, and made her understand, more clearly than she had ever done before, how the sun comes as a bridegroom out of his chamber. Harrifield still slept, and, as she whispered her tribute of prayer, she remembered to thank Heaven for this mercy. It was broad day when Harrifield awoke. The night had gorged his chest, provoking a fit of coughing, and the hemorrhage was thus shown to be unstaunched. Happily Mr. Coldman appeared at the same moment, and Miss Cottle took heart from his face, though he said nothing. But, after a moment, he spoke to Harrifield, asking how he had passed the night, and making other inquiries, which

conveyed a cheering impression. He then gave directions to Miss Cottle, at the same time recommending her to take some rest herself. But she declined to leave her post, except to prepare Harrifield some beef tea; nor did the doctor encourage a relaxation of vigilance by example, as he returned three times during the day, and paid a late visit at night. The captain went his rounds, as it were, and his supervision animated the sentinel.

Needless to chronicle the monotony of the sick room, where day follows day and night, night, in the same routine, yet teaching more than years of activity. For in that time of prostration what thoughts come — bringing home to us our littleness, and showing us our dependence, and our claims on each other. Who can then shut out the conviction that we are not to live for ourselves alone? Here it presented this man of fashion, the idol of coteries, and the favourite of clubs, lying at the mercy of the despised spinster, whom society had always treated as an outcast. And it revealed to

Harrifield the innate goodness of woman, whom he knew only by her outside—her looks, blandishments, and finery, but now found to possess qualities surpassing show. It was not pleasant to reflect that he made the discovery rather late, but perhaps he was not too late, and he tried to hope that he might retrieve some of his derelictions if he recovered his health.

And recover he did. For a week or two he was helpless, but then each day gave him strength, and one morning Mr. Coldman recommended a drive. Travers, who had been assiduous in his attendance, undertook to be coachman, but looked grave when Harrifield proposed that Miss Cottle should be of the party.

"You are yet in a delicate state, remember," he said. "Do you think you can stand it?"

"Stand what?" answered Harrifield.

"The bore of it?" returned Travers.

"I shall consider it a pleasure—pray tell her so."

Travers looked dubious, but withdrew his

opposition, and went to Miss Cottle with the message.

"Don't you wish you may get it?" cried a voice.

"What, Poll! is that you?" exclaimed Travers.

Poll looked as if it were not he, apparently forgetting that Travers had taught him the words, and Miss Cottle blushed at his audacity, and stammered out an apology, at the same time declining the drive. But she consented to go, on hearing her compliance would please Harrifield, and, certainly, her face showed that the attention gave her pleasure.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CLAREMONT.

TRAVERS procured a basket-chaise at the livery stable, and its arrival at the door, announced by the stoppage of wheels, caught the ear of Mrs. Booles, who flew to her window, and had the dissatisfaction of seeing the apotheosis of Miss Cottle—for what lower construction could she put on the fact of the spinster being taken for a drive by her two lodgers? The sight caused Mrs. Booles to gnash her teeth, and she burst into an hysterick laugh when Midge, radiant with triumph, ran out to her mistress with an extra shawl. Happily this agitation had no observers, and Miss Cottle was borne off in the chaise, without suspecting how she had vexed her enemy.

The day was fine, though touched with the chill of October; the foliage of the trees was yet untarnished; and the reaped fields retained their carpet of gold. Harrifield had arranged with Travers to drive to Claremont, remembering that Miss Cottle once expressed a wish to see that abode of sad traditions, and thus they passed through the village of Esher, and entered the Surrey Lanes. A pretty sweep brought them to the lodge, where Travers drew up, and Harrifield invited Miss Cottle to alight.

"This is Claremont," he said. "We can walk up to the house, if you like, and we shall see the grounds as we go."

She knew he had come there on her account, and the attention brought a sparkle to her eyes, which expressed her thanks; but Travers prevented their utterance by adjuring her, in a whisper, not to "bore." He seemed indeed to be under a panic as to Harrifield's susceptibility on this point, insomuch that he cautioned him not to "overdo it in boring" when his friend began to relate some anecdotes of the Prin-

cess Charlotte. As this produced no effect, he shook his head at Miss Cottle, to induce her to discourage the topic, but she was bewildered by the signal, and broke into a perspiration. Happily Harrifield was so entertaining that he made her forget the incident.

But she did not forget to persuade him to rest, as they climbed the ascent to the house, and they came to a stand several times. Thus Harrifield reached the summit without strain.

It was not the charmed spot of Miss Cottle's imagination. A plain brick mansion, squared like a block, and having neither proportion nor comeliness—grounds without a touch of the picturesque, and a prospect without range, hardly indicated a royal retreat.

"You see how little can content a princess," Harrifield said to her. "The heiress of England was happy here, and nowhere else, though she had the whole realm to choose from."

"I am sure all this will do you harm," in-

terposed Travers, no longer able to suppress remonstrance. "I never knew you so bore yourself before."

"I hope you are not saying one word for me, and two for yourself," smiled Harrifield.

Travers protested that he thought only of him—which was certainly true; but he should have added that he judged of his feelings by his own. Harrifield understood his condition, and sent him to bring up the chaise from the gate by way of release. He was not afraid of wearying Miss Cottle, who showed that she enjoyed his conversation, and he told her of other tenants of Claremont than the Princess Charlotte — of Margaret of Newcastle and the venerable Queen of the French, relating, moreover, stories of the time when the drive through the grounds formed the Portsmouth road, and was infested by highwaymen. She wondered to find him so amusing, and wondered more that he should lay himself out to amuse a solitary old maid like herself. It touched her deeper than appreciation from her own sex, because he was one the proudest

of her sex might admire, and her heart responded to his kindness with almost a mother's love.

They were met by Travers with the chaise as they walked down, and half-an-hour brought them to Miss Cottle's door, where Harrifield alighted all the better for his airing.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PROOFS.

It was with renewed hope for himself that Alfred started on a search for a case for Mr. Blandford. He felt as if fortune had opened him a way to establish a claim at once on Annie and her father, and this not only stimulated his zeal as a lawyer, but revived his ardour as a lover. He no longer resisted his inclination to think of Annie, to recall her image, and to review, again and again, all she said and did at their last meeting, the tones in which she spoke, her words and looks, and her every gesture. But it was not the sense of her personal beauty that occupied his mind : he dwelt rather on her sweet nature, which continually showed

itself, and which he had particularly noted in her attention to his mother, at Lady Clara's party, and in her tender devotion to her own mother. This mental loveliness—the angel within—etherialises a woman's external grace, so as to make this suggest an angel without, and it imparts a spiritual beauty, where the grace of person is wanting. Let no woman make light of such a gift—the power of transfiguring herself, as it were—of making herself transparent, and so doubling her charms where charms exist, and where there are none, blinding us to their absence.

Alfred was happier for thus permitting himself to think of Annie, and felt the better, too. He could not raise himself to her level—the pedestal on which she stood in his imagination—which, indeed, was a cubit higher than her natural stature. But he found in this a standard of character, by which he could modify his own, and it was here that he profited. It was what Goëthe would call an elective affinity. He assimilated with Annie, and by constantly admiring,

came to partake of her nature. And he committed himself to this idea—that *she must be his*: he would strike in for her again, and either win or perish.

His feelings towards Annie led him into a partisan feeling for her father, whose interests were inseparable from hers, and he conceived that the circumstances justified him in using every device in Mr. Blandford's defence. Certainly it was a case that might be permitted to put a little strain on conscience. Society would recognise Mr. Blandford's legitimacy, even if it were disallowed by law, yet he was to be despoiled of the estate he acquired by inheritance, and to which no one could dispute his natural right. The injustice converted Alfred to a belief in the dogma of marrying a deceased wife's sister, and he read up the subject, and found that, as in most questions, there was much to be said on both sides, though, of course, he considered that the side he espoused had the best of the argument. Thus he allowed his heart to warp his judgment, and it was only when he broke ground that this resumed its ascendancy.

The ground was the village of Lazenby in Warwickshire, a still old place, and dull, as beffited an agricultural nook. Such a spot offered but a narrow field for research, yet Alfred alighted there hopeful, and lost no time in setting to work. Lazenby had once been the residence of Ralph Blandford, Mr. Blandford's father, and Alfred fancied that it might still retain traditions of his habitation. True, Ralph Blandford had left the village fifty years before, but, in so quiet a place, a resident's memory, like a great man's, might outlive himself half a century, and leave some impress in the minds of his neighbours. So Alfred strolled down the winding road, along which the cottages spread, as on the banks of a river. There were two or three superior dwellings, of which one was the parsonage, and here Alfred thought to begin his inquiries, but found that the clergyman was from home, and would not return for several days. An old domestic directed him to the sexton, who lived, she said, in a gabled house, at the bottom of the village. Alfred found his

way there in a few minutes. The house stood a little back from the road, and was a pile of red brick, fallen to decay, its two tiled gables being sunk in hollows like an old man's face. And such an old man now appeared in the porch to point the resemblance. Alfred recognised the sexton by instinct, and at once opened a parley.

"Good morning. You are an old inhabitant here?"

"That I be, sir," replied the sexton, moving down to the gate. "Man and boy, I've been seventy year in Lazenby."

"And do you remember anything of your boy-time?—say sixty years ago."

"Well, I was a ploughboy then, sir, and worked for Muster Roakes, whose son and daughter went off to Australia, ten year last Martinmas. I can't say as I remember a deal more."

"You know who lived in the village?"

"Oh, yes! there was Parson Simmons, and Muster Ridley, who was sexton, as I be now, sir, and there was Mrs. Clam, who had

the shop there, as is now kept by Mrs. Beaman, and the ale-house was kept by Roger Wills. Ah! you had good ale then —none o' your doctored stuff, and many a mug I had with Roger hisself—by the same token he was the first I put underground, after I got to be sexton—for I was only on trial like, when I buried Muster Ridley, who was sexton afore me.”

“ But do you recollect none of the gentry? For instance, who lived in this house?—for it must have been a good one then.”

“ No doubt, no doubt, sir, but it’s seen its best days, like myself. It’s that tumble-down, inside, you can’t pull down the cob-webs for fear of bringing down the beams, too. But it will last my time, sir—for I ain’t many year to go now, and who’ll be sexton at my buryin’ is more nor I can say. Maybe, it will be young Willum Reeve, the carpenter; for I believe he’s been lookin’ arter it for ten year past.”

“ He may be disappointed, though. Ten years are a long time to wait for a dead man’s shoes, and I hope you will keep him

out of them ten years more. But you haven't told me who lived in this house in your young days."

"To speak the truth, sir, I can't mind the name just this minute, but there were two of 'em hereabout, one in this house, and one at Slowdown, about two mile off, and I've heard tell they'd been in these parts a hundred year, or longer nor that—maybe, two or three hundred."

"Was the name Blandford?"

"Well, that's just put it in my head, sir, for squire Blandford—he wasn't quite a squire, but they called him so, because he had two farms of his own : squire Blandford, I was goin' to say, married the daughter of one of 'em, but which it was I can't tell for certain. Let me see, the name were—"

"Selwyn!" suggested Alfred.

"That's it, sir—you've got it. But, Lord ! it's so long ago, it's as much as I can recollect. They're all in the churchyard there, but Muster Ridley was sexton then, and I can't be expected to know about his buryings, you see."

“But did you know nothing about these people when they were alive?”

“Lord bless you, no, sir! except that I’ve see ’em in the village sometimes, and just touched my hat. The times was different from what they be now, sir, I can tell you, and a poor man hardly lifted his eyes when a gentleman would go by. No schoolin’ for youngsters in them days, sir—no bean feasts, nor nothing o’ that sort, except just some beer and bacon and singing at shearin’ or harvest: that’s all you had! Other times, only work, work, work, or in the poor-house.”

“The good old times!” said Alfred. “But I suppose they kept a parish register in those days, and that you can let me look at it.”

“Ay, surely, sir. I’ll get the key o’ the church, and go up with you this minute.”

The sexton went off with a step which promised to fulfil Alfred’s good wishes, by keeping “Willum Reeve” some time longer in expectancy, and he presently reappeared, key in hand. The church stood behind the

parsonage, but was only visible on approach, being one of the low stone edifices of the fourteenth century, without tower or spire. Alfred followed the sexton to a mausoleum, inscribed with the names of “Mr. James Selwyn, of Brent House, in this parish.” “Ruth, relict of the above,” and two of their children. A few paces further rose a tomb of the same era, dedicated to another Selwyn, and Alfred’s heart beat quick as, with his first glance, he found this prefixed by the same Christian name—“Sacred to the Memory of Mr. JAMES Selwyn, of the hamlet of Slowdown, in this parish.” Here were two James’s! Why might not Agnes Selwyn be the daughter of one, as well as of the other? Was there any means of showing she was not? Alfred felt impatient to examine the parish register, and see if it contained such evidence. The sexton led the way to the church, unlocked the vestry, and produced a ponderous tome, and, taking a seat by the window, the young lawyer began his search.

Who has not noted the repetition of
15—2

names in the register of a country village, where peasants go back with a genealogy longer than can be shown by many nobles, turning up, one generation after another, with the same Christian names, to prove their lineal descent? The sexton was within the mark in saying the Selwyns had lived in the neighbourhood “a hundred year or longer.” There were Selwyns from the first page of the register, in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and the hundred years pointed the time when they began to thin, instead of the date of their first location. From this epoch Alfred began to trace two families, and in both lines each generation preserved the names of James and Agnes. So he came to the baptism of “Agnes, daughter of James and Ruth Selwyn, of Brent House.” His finger trembled as he ran it down the succeeding entries, and then his eyes seemed to turn in his head ; for the next page chronicled the baptism of another Agnes, “daughter of James and Mary Selwyn,” and there was no mention of the father’s place of residence.

Nothing could be better adapted to obscure the case, and so protect Mr. Blandford. And further search thickened the entanglement; for the James of Brent House, was shown to be the father of Louisa, the second wife of Ralph Blandford, and this marriage was recorded in the marriage-register, but no entry appeared of the marriage of either Agnes. All now depended on the register of interments. Alfred had built up such a defence, that he shrank from opening that audit of death, and stood before the closed book as before Fate. One line within, indeed, applying to the case, might as effectually bring his hopes to an end, as a blow from death's sickle. It is often at the last we are disappointed—when the cup is almost at the lip, and we are anticipating its sweetness. Alfred remembered this, and he leant his head on his hand, and thought of Annie.

But the pause was only for a moment. The next saw him deep in the register, eagerly scanning the entries. Two or three pages were slowly turned, when his eye met

the portentous name—“AGNES SELWYN,” *Which* Agnes? He stared at the two words, as if their characters embalmed the secret, and would yield it to his gaze. Then he drew a breath of relief. If Harrifield possessed no key to this mystery—and none seemed to be possible—he felt that Mr. Blandford was safe.

The day was now closing, and Alfred parted with the sexton, not without giving him a token of remembrance, and made his way to the village inn. The “Red Lion” was a small establishment, having only one room for superior visitors, and, as he entered the passage, Alfred caught the clatter of a knife and fork, announcing that at least one of this class was already in possession. But he had no objection to a companion; so, having ordered his dinner, he pushed open the door, and passed into the room. He gave a little start as he looked up, and found himself in the presence of Ravel.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE TWO LAWYERS.

RAVEL had hardly been apprised of Lord Bramblecourt's wish to settle the suit against Mr. Blandford by a marriage between Harrifield and Annie, when he learnt from Travers that such an arrangement would be attended with difficulty, if it did not prove impracticable, inasmuch as there was reason to believe that Annie, unconscious of the issues at stake, had already refused Harrifield. The lawyer thought this information of such importance, that he posted off with it to the Earl for further instructions, and then, to his surprise, learnt that Lord Bramblecourt had not opened the subject to Harrifield, believing that the task

had better be left to Lady Clara. Both felt that the marriage could not now be counted upon. Not that they despaired of overcoming the objections of Annie. She of course would give way, now that she understood her position. But the Earl declared that heaven and earth would fail to move that "confounded, obstinate dog, Charley, if he stood on his dignity." No doubt the tact of Lady Clara might do much, and she would try to arouse him to a sense of what was due to his family, and if the girl herself was clever, all might go smooth. But they must be prepared for disappointment, and Ravel should take care to ground his case on the most conclusive basis.

It was this object that brought Ravel to Lazenby. He had arrived so late in the day, that he deferred investigation till the morrow, and for the moment decided to take his ease in his inn. Fortunately he had finished his dinner, when surprised by the appearance of Alfred, or the incident might have affected his appetite, and cer-

tainly Alfred's was a little marred. Instinct told each what was the errand of the other.

But lawyers are sociable creatures, and neither Alfred nor Ravel was a pettifogger; so, after a time, their shyness began to thaw, and another half hour found them sitting together, by the fire.

"I suppose it is useless to propose a bottle of champagne?" remarked Alfred.

"You might as well think of a bottle of ambrosia," replied Ravel. "There is nothing to be had here better than brandy and water."

"And I prefer a glass of home-brewed," rejoined Alfred, ringing the bell.

The landlord appeared, and the two beverages were ordered, and at once supplied.

"What do you say to a weed?" resumed Alfred, when they were thus provided, producing his cigar-case as he spoke.

"I say capital," said Ravel, selecting a paragon. "These are A 1, and draw very mild, I should think."

"As mild as milk, or I couldn't manage

them.” Here Alfred lit his cigar, and both remained silent till they had enveloped themselves in a cloud. Then, prompted by the combined influence of tobacco and brandy-and-water, and by after-dinner fellowship, Ravel became sentimental.

“It’s a strange thing how men, with their superior sense and abilities, are twisted about by women,” he remarked. “I believe you can do nothing without bringing in a woman, or without a woman bringing in herself, which amounts to the same thing. Now, this ought not to be, and I can’t account for it, but so it is! I suppose it is nature.”

“I don’t agree with your premises,” replied Alfred. “How can we attribute this ascendancy to women, if men are superior in sense and abilities?”

“How they compass it I don’t know, but there are the facts. I believe it is done by trickery, but the trickery is so confounded pleasant, and so artful, that we don’t see it, and don’t care to find it out.”

“I am afraid you have some grievance against the sex,” said Alfred, with a smile,

though the words shot a thrill of pain through his own breast.

"Not at all—none whatever ;" answered Ravel. "I don't mean to say I like the whole of them—and, you will own they *can* be very rusty, nor do I consider them to be rational beings. The figures they make of themselves—particularly the old ones, with their gew-gaws and chignons and trains, and mites of bonnet, is against that. But of course, I have my taste about them. I have got my fancy."

"Then let us drink her health!" And Alfred raised his glass.

"With all my heart," exclaimed Ravel, flourishing his brandy-and-water. "Here is to—"

He stopped.

"Never mind her name, if it is a secret," cried Alfred. "We will drink to the consummation of her happiness and your own."

"The deuce of it is, I don't know whether she will have me or not," said Ravel, after they had honoured the toast. "Now she seems inclined, now she stands off, and I am

afraid to come to the point, lest she should start away altogether. Indeed, she almost did this at our last meeting. What can one do in such a case?"

"It is a difficult question," said Alfred, with sad reminiscences.

"But what would you advise?"

"Caution," answered Alfred, after a pause. "If you don't see your way, it is better to reveal your preference by your manner than words, which might provoke a refusal."

"You are right, and you see I am acting on this plan. From the first I judged that it must be a thing of time, and that a false step would spoil all. For a refusal is the very devil: there is no getting over it—at least, it is as hard to get over as the Matterhorn, where I once nearly broke my neck."

"I think you exaggerate a little," rejoined Alfred, quickly. "No doubt a refusal is a great bar, but circumstances may follow that sweep it away, and leave the course open again."

"Such circumstances can only be of one species—or better call them specie; for they

must hinge on money. That is our chance of an arrangement in the business that brings us to Lazenby. Otherwise we shall have a long fight, if you can make out any case to go upon."

"As regards the case, I hope we have a pretty good one," returned Alfred, meeting Ravel's hawk glance ; "and, as far as I know, we intend to fight to the death. I have heard nothing about an arrangement, and can't imagine what your allusions point at."

"Is it possible ? But that is just Blandford's way. In his confidences he always keeps back half, and the half he does keep back is what wrecks him. Well, I shall commit no breach of trust in being more communicative. It is for my client's interest that you should know the truth, though from what I am told, I believe the attempt at an arrangement, however willing your side may be, will fail. The difficulty will be with the man, not the woman."

"All this is unfathomable to me," smiled Alfred. "What have we to do with women in this case?"

"Here we come round to my starting-point," cried Ravel, taking his cigar from his mouth, and holding it up oracularly. "How could you have a case without a woman? Doesn't this whole business rise from the marriage of Blandford's mother? But she is dead, you will say. Very true. But what about his daughter?"

"Nothing, but what is to her honour," gasped Alfred.

Ravel dealt him another glance, which he met, like the previous one, unmoved.

"Naturally you are interested about her, as your client's daughter," Ravel resumed, "nor have I ever heard a word against her. But I suppose she is like my miss—doesn't know her own mind. Anyhow, we have heard a whisper that she had a chance of my client before we advanced a claim to the estate, and she gave him the cold shoulder. The question now is whether we can induce him to come on again."

"I am not sure that I understand you," said Alfred, excitedly.

"For that you must thank her father.

You ought to have been told that, as the estate must fall to my client at his death, a proposition has been made to compromise the matter by a marriage between him and Miss Blandford."

"I see," ejaculated Alfred. And he leant back in his chair, while a film came over his eyes, and the room seemed to whirl round. But he felt that he should betray himself, if he remained there longer. "I must now bid you good night," he said. "I have had a hard day of it, and need rest."

He managed to shamble into the passage, where he summoned the chambermaid, and followed her to his own room. He sank in a chair as she withdrew, and would now have welcomed unconsciousness. But he was not to obtain this relief.

To have climbed so near the attainment of his wishes—to have seemed able to raise his hand, and hoist himself to the summit, and at this crisis, to be thrust down, was a more cruel disappointment than his first failure. It brought back upon him all the agony of that blow—and more! and now he could not

offer the same resistance. To resist, indeed, was not in his thoughts. Who could go through such a struggle a second time? He had intended to cut out the cancer, but here it was again, deeper rooted, and showing itself as tenacious as his life. Can it be that any one woman has power to cast upon us such a blight? Are there not other nymphs as fair—perhaps, fairer, with dispositions as winning, and hearts more susceptible? Let us look round, and strange will it be if we find not as good, perhaps a comelier mate. Alas! this will not satisfy the craving of the heart. A mysterious attraction draws us exclusively to one, fixes that one in our imagination, throws round her a halo visible to us alone, and colours this with all the romance in our character. Not till we have a second youth, can we have a second love.

So Alfred let the tide rush upon him, as it were, and lay him prostrate. He was helpless, dead! Body and mind were alike powerless, and life a blank. He had made the resolution to win or perish, and fate brought his doom, without leaving him the choice.

But another resolution he could carry out. He would give up his profession, and fly to some remote country, where he might hide himself in the solitudes of nature. Would that he could hide *from* himself! In those wilds he might indeed be buried, but it would be buried alive. This he understood.

And Annie! Could he leave her for ever? The thought brought her up in his mind, in her every grace, and all her beauty, and his eyes glistened, as they rested on the vision. For this, though born within, translated itself into form, and rose to his outward gaze. Indeed, for an instant it exercised a kindled effect on himself, taking him out of his senses, and throwing him into a sort of trance. He was with Annie, he felt her presence, saw and adored. All his anguish passed from remembrance. Then came a dreadful perception. She was not his, and never could be.

See her again? Never! for he felt that to do so would drive him mad. His strong nature had thrown its might into this pas-

sion, and now that the passion was cut down, he was like Samson shorn of his hair. Nothing remained of his courage, nothing of his fortitude, and he had no resource but flight.

The first dawn saw him leave the inn, on his return to London. Here he at once dispatched a note to Mr. Blandford, inquiring whether Ravel's statement, which he repeated, rested on good grounds, and adding that it was important for him to be informed of any arrangement in contemplation. Impatiently he awaited Mr. Blandford's answer. Not that he had a doubt. The fact was too probable, and, as he owned to himself, involved an arrangement that, having regard solely to the interests of the litigants, was too desirable. Yet he did not suffer his mind to dwell on this conclusion. The truth would intrude indeed, like a stab, thrilling his whole frame. But a thousand times he recoiled from the thrust, preferring the torture of suspense to the horror of despair.

Thus he passed a week, when the post

brought him the following letter from Mr. Blandford :—

“Torquay, October 25th.

“MY DEAR SIR,

“There *is* something in what you have heard from Mr. Ravel, and if we had happened to meet, I should not have left you to receive the information at secondhand. The matter, however, has at present hardly been more than mentioned, and I do not feel warranted in writing about it. Even in the event of its being proceeded with, our position will require all the strength it can derive from your skill and researches.

“Your letter should have been answered before, but only reached my hand this morning, owing to my being on the move, and the London post from Torquay is the same as before the Conqueror—steam. Letters only go to London once a-day, and all communication is cut off at 6 p.m.—Such are the attractions of a fashionable watering-place !

“Yours sincerely,

“ROBERT BLANDFORD.”

Alfred did not know what to make of this missive. At first, his impressions took the colour of his fears, but they brightened on his reading the letter again, and, finally, he persuaded himself that the case was not yet desperate. At any rate, he would not give up until he had had a meeting with Mr. Blandford—and, perhaps, Annie. Such are the resolutions of lovers, as frail as their vows, and as vapoury as their breath ! But how can we look for constancy in man !

CHAPTER XXVI.

MR. BLANDFORD IS SURPRISED.

THE marriage project was pursued by Mr. Blandford with more ardour than Alfred supposed. In fact, he considered it his mainstay, and, apart from this, it was desirable in itself. Whatever hope he might build on Alfred's law, he believed that the facts, if they could be ascertained, were against him, and that his right could only be upheld through some flaw in the evidence. This was not a case to challenge investigation. On the other hand, the marriage with Harrifield assured him of possession of the estate during his life, subject to a settlement on Annie, and, through her, the property would ultimately devolve upon his descend-

ants. At the same time, she would become connected with the aristocracy, and the death of Lord Bramblecourt would enrol her in the peerage. Here was everything to meet his wishes, and satisfy his ambition.

The prospect was suddenly clouded by Harrifield's illness. Mr. Blandford would not have been disturbed by his death ; for there would then have been no one to dispute the succession to the estate, but sickness created delay, and delay was dangerous. In this case, however, it ultimately proved an advantage. News arrived of Harrifield's recovery, and, a week later, he wrote himself to Lady Clara that he intended to spend the winter at Torquay. Thus events seemed to play into Mr. Blandford's hands. He determined to turn them to the best account by being on the spot : so he engaged a furnished house, near that taken by Lady Clara, and brought down Mrs. Blandford, intending, now she was again under his roof, to use her influence over Annie in furtherance of his design.

It had not escaped his notice that she was

some way changed, but the change was greater than he thought. Perhaps, she might be affected by the example of Annie, who had dispelled the impression of his omnipotence, or by contact with Annie's character, or both influences combined. But these influences could only have operated in a degree. The primary source of the transformation, as it might be called, was her release from the deadweight on her heart, and she met him without dread, because she knew that he could not cast her away. Not but what she retained a certain timidity, and, under pressure, hesitated and faltered, but she was no longer cowed. It might be that she exercised little will of her own, but she showed herself less dependent on others ; she took an interest in passing incidents, and seemed to be at peace.

But the light of her existence was Annie. She thought Annie at once the most beautiful and the most perfect of her sex, without fault in character or blemish in person. In her eye, it was not Alfred Mockright who had established her marriage, and dispersed

her life-long sorrow : she gave all the credit to Annie, and Alfred merely acted under Annie's inspiration. And it was Annie who had been her comfort through the strain, who had for her sake withstood her own father, and for her given up fortune, position, and all the pleasures of the world. So she environed her with a mother's idolatry, heightened by gratitude, and refined by trial. For Annie she could not only lay down her life : she was ready to turn and fight, as the sheep will face the dog in defence of its lamb.

Annie met her at the station, when she arrived at Torquay. Lady Clara, too, was there, but Mrs. Blandford saw only Annie ; and the mother and daughter fell into each other's arms. Then Mrs. Blandford looked in Annie's face, and thought it wore a tinge of sadness, but the flurry of greetings left no time for parley. Lady Clara wished to take them both home to dinner, but Mrs. Blandford pleaded fatigue, and it was arranged that she and Annie should go to their own house, and receive a visit from Lady Clara

in the morning, when they could settle their further plans.

Meanwhile, Mr. Blandford laid himself out to please Annie, though he neglected one means by rather overlooking her mother. Annie could not but feel gratified, however, by the pride he took in herself, nor was she unmoved by his little displays of affection. Thus they all passed an agreeable evening, and Annie laid her head on her pillow more at peace than she had done for some time.

For her mind had been dwelling on the projected marriage. Lady Clara, indeed, brought it up more than once, and said her say with due tact. It is true, she only enumerated the advantages of the match, and spoke warmly in commendation of Harrifield. These were the points she conceived to be of the first import, and likeliest to interest a young girl, or, indeed, a woman of any age. She knew not of deep springs of character, and that it was here Annie must be touched. But what she said did impress Annie, nevertheless ; for it led her to the

considerations which she had omitted. There was now more at stake than when Annie had been inclined to accept Harrifield in pity : the issue involved the family inheritance, and, as her father urged, even the family honour. And what could she put in the opposite scale ? Alas ! *that*—hardly acknowledged to herself—must be buried in her own bosom.

Next day Lady Clara paid her promised visit, remaining for some time ; nor would she go away till Annie agreed to be her companion in a drive. This left Mrs. Blandford alone with her husband, and he thought it a favourable moment for giving her his instructions.

“ I saw you and Lady Clara talking seriously while Annie was engaged with me,” he said. “ Did she touch on the business of the marriage ? ”

“ She mentioned it,” replied Mrs. Blandford, “ but I changed the subject.”

“ Indeed,” rejoined her husband, with a smile and hoist of his eyebrows. “ How did you manage that ? ”

"I told her I was afraid Annie might overhear us, and that I didn't yet know whether she inclined to the project."

"How could she do otherwise? Doesn't it embrace all a girl in her senses can desire? More than that, can you forget that it concerns our very existence?"

Mr. Blandford's look was very benignant, so was his tone, yet, somehow, they unhinged his wife—perhaps because she thought them underlaid by stubborn purpose.

"I know you consider the object very important," she answered, meekly: "certainly, it is so. And Annie, you know, is so very sensible and so good, and sees things so clearly, that you may depend on her weighing it well. I am sure I have no wish in the matter but for her happiness."

"Now don't talk in this vein, my dear Sophy," returned her smiling lord. "Happiness is all nonsense. Of course, it is for her happiness: it will give her fortune, rank, and a good husband, who is, besides, one of the handsomest fellows of the day. These

are the things which your sex regard as constituting happiness. If you mean that Annie is to put such objects aside, and ruin herself and us for a sentiment, then I say that we shall be criminal to permit it."

Mrs. Blandford made no reply.

"You understand what I expect from you in this matter?" pursued Mr. Blandford.

She was still silent—partly from bewilderment, partly from terror.

"You must speak to her earnestly and without delay," he continued, divining her feelings.

"I will take the first opportunity," she now said, falteringly.

"Let it be to-day. Mr. Harrifield is to be here next week, and she must be prepared to accept him, and end our suspense and all litigation. Now do, Sophy, exert yourself for me—ay, and for Annie, too. Remember all there is at stake here, and what a happy arrangement this will be. Promise me to use your utmost influence with Annie."

"I can't do that—impossible!" murmured Mrs. Blandford.

Her husband was betrayed into a start of surprise: then he took her hands, and held them in his own, one in each.

"My dear Sophy, what is it you mean?" he said. "Explain yourself. Don't you intend to recommend this marriage to Annie?"

"Never!"

"Not at my request—even my command?"

"No!"

She spoke without tremor now: she looked him in the face, she met his eye, and did not quail. *But Mr. Blandford did!* He turned away, and threw himself in a chair.

"Deserted by my wife, what can I expect from my child, who has already been so rebellious!" he exclaimed. "I am undone—undone!"

"I said that I would speak to her, and I will," resumed Mrs. Blandford, in a tender tone, "but it is on condition that you accept her answer to me as final. Do you agree to this?"

"I will agree to anything," replied Mr. Blandford, adding inaudibly—"when she agrees to the marriage."

And he got up and strode out of the room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE ABBEY AVENUE.

EVERYONE must be inspirited by a drive through the environs of Torquay, where we have the perfection of English scenery with the atmosphere of Naples, and no drawback but turnpikes, which, blocking every outlet from the town, do, indeed, call for an invasion of Rebeccaites. But those barriers gave little annoyance to Lady Clara and Annie, the extortionate tolls being paid by the footman ; and they were rather amused to find the carriage caught in every direction. Annie begged Lady Clara to set her down at the bottom of the Belgrave road, as the high tide invited a stroll by the sea, and she could thence walk home through the Abbey

avenue. So she alighted, and the carriage rolled off, leaving her to watch its progress round the cliffs towards the Strand.

It was a good spot for viewing the town—from here seen lying, like a nestling, in the lap of the heights, the Waldron hill rising behind, with its head aloft, and spreading on one hand into the hill of the Beacon and into Park hill on the other—a mother's bosom and her open arms. Against this barrier beat the east wind in vain, while the soaring Warren rose in flank, and shut off the blasts of the north-west. The white villas everywhere gleamed through woods, which October had hardly tinged, or rose from verdant slopes, hedged with evergreens, and commanding the expanse of Torbay. The opposite side of the bay was walled round by slopes as verdant, ranging from historic Brixham to Chelston Cross, haunt of the historic Muse, and thence sweeping in a semicircle round Tor Park, where, with the towering Tor, they formed a screen against the north and east. Such is England's Riviera, perfect from the hand

of Nature, but which man, by a vile system of drainage, a choked harbour, and the neglect of sanitary arrangements, is rather putting on the strain.

Annie walked along to a path, which led across a field to the Abbey, whence there extended an avenue of trees in two directions, one to Belgravia, and the other to Tor Park. The trees formed an arch overhead, sometimes as perfect as that of a cloister, an effect heightened by the remnants of the Abbey, seen through the foliage. At one point Annie climbed the little bank, to peer at these relics, now incorporated with a modern edifice, but at this spot showing their antiquity—here in rugged stone, the granite formation, and here in diluvial brick. One traced the mailed hand of the Mohuns there, and the quaint touch of the Elizabethan Carys here, and Annie thought how the roof had looked down on generations of joys and sorrows, of which not a wrack remained. Well might the pile be called an Abbey, for its every stone was a sermon. She turned away, her heart full of sorrow,

but thinking what a breath, after all, was life.

The sound of a footstep caused her to look up, and she gave a start, as she found herself confronted by Jessie. Jessie was equally disturbed.

“Annie Blandford!” she exclaimed, in a breathless tone.

“Yes,” replied Annie, coldly, “and I ought to have known Jessie Balcombe was near: I felt such a weight in my breast.”

“My shadow, no doubt,” rejoined Jessie. “Well, I can’t say you are sunshine to me. Believe me, I had rather not have met you, but since met we have, we can modify the annoyance by a short greeting. Farewell, Annie Blandford—for ever!”

“Farewell,” muttered Annie.

So they parted, but hardly had Annie taken a step, when her heart softened. Sneers and bitterness were, indeed, on Jessie’s lips, but had she not read sorrow in her face? Annie turned round, and called out her name, but Jessie walked on, without responding. Annie stood an instant—then

glided along the road till she came behind Jessie, and laid her hand on her shoulder.

"Why do you stop me?" demanded Jessie, averting her eyes. "We can't be friends, nor can you forgive the evil I have brought on your family, though not on yourself. I told you once I had an evil spirit in me, and you should have been warned—not that the result could be prevented. Fate will take its course. I now see it is useless to contend, and resign myself to what is to be. But I can't repress my bitterness—perhaps, you will call it my envy, or my spite, and it may be both. So I want to say nothing—only to part."

"And I wish but to say that I entertain no ill-feeling towards you," replied Annie, "though you have indeed brought misfortune on my family, and consequently on me, however you may think me exempted."

"You will think yourself so by and bye, when you know how things are to be arranged—for you seem to be ignorant that an arrangement is intended. Of course, delicacy forbids you to be told at present."

Annie understood this taunt, which could only allude to the project of marriage ; and it sent a flush to her cheek, though the resentful answer died on her lips. Her spirit was too saddened for anger, and the sorrow, which frenzied Jessie, in her awoke forbearance.

“ Whatever may happen, I shall not be an object of envy,” she said. “ Good-bye, Jessie ! Say you wish me no ill !”

She held out her hand. Jessie flushed and paled, as if she were wrestling with some deep feeling—then seized the proffered hand, and pressed it to her lips.

“ May you be—be happy !” she cried, with an hysterick sob.

And, before Annie could reply, she darted up the bank, and disappeared behind the trees.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN APPARITION.

ANNIE remained stationary. Her heart was full, and she could have wept, but resisted the impulse. She remembered that Jessie had her love-trial, as well as herself, and how the thought once occurred to her that she loved Harrifield. Could this be? Annie recalled what passed when she all but put the question. But, on that occasion, Jessie's pride, aided by her habit of deception, had baffled scrutiny, and Annie could recollect nothing to justify her suspicion. Indeed, she was led to believe it unfounded. Slowly she turned her steps homewards. She knew that she would find no comfort there; for her mother's arrival foretold some deci-

sive measure, and, besides, she shrank from burdening her with a grief which she thought should be wholly her own. The case was now different from when she made her a confidante, and told her how she had been wooed by Harrifield, and how she met his overtures. She had then reported a fact; now she must make a confession—a confession she had then half breathed, but must now for ever suppress.

Mrs. Blandford understood that explanation would be painful. She had promised to speak to Annie, but it was with an intention to console, not counsel, or if counsel, then to urge her to think only of her own happiness. She still wished, indeed, that this could have been attained by the marriage—even thought that it might be, and she could not forget what depended on the marriage. But she knew that Annie would not forget, neither; and what she had to consider was not how to impress her with the advantages of the match, but to prevent these from exercising more than due weight.

This was the feeling at the bottom of her heart, but the advantages rested there, too, and she had a parent's hankering for the fortune, peerage, and high destiny, which promised to fall to Harrifield's wife. Moreover she reflected that it was natural for Mr. Blandford to desire such a position for his daughter, particularly when so deeply concerned himself, and that he would make Annie's rejection of it a life-long grievance. So she wavered and vacillated, thinking over what she should say to Annie, till she became distracted, and nothing remained of her recent steadfastness.

But when she met Annie—when Annie came in, looking fagged and dejected, but greeting her with a sweet smile, this vacillation disappeared. She was now again the devoted mother; thinking no more of herself, no more of her husband, oblivious of considerations of rank and fortune, and heeding only that Annie was suffering.

“Come to me, my darling,” she said, drawing her to her bosom, “and tell me what you wish—for I know it is this

proposed marriage which makes you so unhappy."

"Don't think me unhappy, mamma," replied Annie. "Of course I have dwelt on the matter a good deal, and, perhaps, I have made a trouble of it, but I mustn't let it be one to you—only you know what has passed between Mr. Harrifield and me, and will understand that this increases my difficulty."

"Certainly, dear," said Mrs. Blandford, without a clear perception on the subject.

"You remember that he construed what I said as a refusal, and for me to accept him now, would seem as if it were solely to save our estate."

"But you might have other reasons, Annie!" faltered Mrs. Blandford, a little startled by this view.

"And I really have, mamma, though the one of greatest weight is, that this is a case in which I am bound to devote myself to the interests of my family. But I have also thought that I owe something to Mr. Harrifield. For a moment I imagined that he entertained no real

affection for me—something came under my eye that gave me that impression ; but if, believing that I refused him in our elevation, he now seeks me in our adversity—if the proposal comes from himself, I must admit that he shows an honest, even devoted attachment, and this I must respect, and—” Annie drooped here—“will even try to return.”

“ Is it possible you have decided to accept him ? ”

“ If he voluntarily asks me, I shall answer that I am at papa’s disposal.”

“ Dear Annie, consider well before you take this step,” rejoined Mrs. Blandford, frightened at the too easy compliance. “ You have been thinking of everybody but yourself, and in this business, yourself should be the first thought. Do not be influenced by our difficulty about the estate. Your papa has a fair income without it; and I had rather we fell back on my sixty pounds a-year, than you should contract a marriage which would give splendour, but bring you no joy. Think what my married life has

been ! Do not condemn yourself to one as wretched !”

“ That is taking a gloomy view, indeed, mamma. But you don’t see what I lay out for myself in the undertaking—for undertaking, I know, it is, in the objects and duties I connect with it, and in which I trust to find satisfaction. Believe me, dear mamma, I have done what you recommend—considered it well, and I no longer hesitate.”

Suddenly a thought shot across Mrs. Blandford’s mind. It was like an electric flash, and lit her whole horizon—alas ! only to expire in gloom. For the enquiry she whispered in Annie’s ear elicited an answer too plain in her silence.

“ My dear, dear, dear child ! my sweet Annie ! my poor wounded darling !” cried the mother, with streaming eyes, and folding Annie closer in her arms : “ is not this a reason why you should pause ? Oh ! take time ! do not—do not decide rashly.”

“ Mamma, I have made up my mind,” replied Annie. She untwined her mother’s

embrace, but retained her hands, clasping them within her own. "Look at me ! Do I seem undecided ? I am rather anxious that all suspense should be over, and I want you to go at once to papa, dear—for I am sure he is waiting for you—and tell him what I have said."

"Must it be, dear Annie?"

Annie replied by pressing a kiss on her lips ; then led her to the door, and left her to proceed, remaining behind herself.

The feeling which formed the theme of Mrs. Blandford's whisper had not been absent from Annie's mind, but instead of operating as a check, it urged her forward. She became dizzy with it, and she took the leap, as some persons jump from a height, under an irresistible impulse. Not that the momentum came wholly from bewilderment. There was also a feeling of resentment—even of anger, but anger tempered by fondness, and drowned in tears. There was the bitterness of disappointment, aggravated by self-blame : there was pique, and there was desperation. But these emotions facilitated,

rather than dictated her decision, which had its basis in the motives she mentioned to her mother, and aimed at duty.

And now all was settled. She had given her promise, and awaited the result like one who had renounced the world, and dedicated herself to a mission. Her misery was complete. No longer did she feel resentment or bitterness ; the ferment had died out, and she faced the future with the heart of a woman.

The door opened, and her ear caught an exclamation, when she sprang from her seat with a cry. It was Alfred.

He had come to see Mr. Blandford, and the servant showed him into the drawing-room without perceiving Annie. But a glance revealed her to Alfred, and her agitation told him more than words.

He darted forward ; he caught her in his arms, as she was falling ; he pushed back her waving hair ; he pressed her to his bosom, and covered her face with kisses. Could it be ? Was this real ? Or was he under some illusion ? She unclosed her

eyes—those eyes of amber, illumined by soul : and all her soul spoke of love for him. Let him fall at her feet, let him spring into the air, or find some escape for the joy which his breast could not contain ! Soon this was to meet a check. Annie permitted him another embrace, and then gently freed herself.

“ Ah ! why did you not come before ? ” she said, sorrowfully : “ you are too late.”

“ That cannot be, when you love me,” replied Alfred, though with changed colour. “ How too late, while you are unmarried—while you are free ? ”

“ Would that I were ! But my freedom is gone, and I have promised to marry as my father wishes. What he proposes I need not explain ; for your words intimate that you already know. The result is now past our control, and I feel that we ought not to have met.”

She covered her eyes with her hands, and stood motionless, her arms showing their graceful mould through their drapery, and leading the eye to her rounded waist and

light, elastic form. It is said that she was *motionless*—and so she was actually, but there seemed to be a motion in the wave of her frame, the motion of a hundred graces, the motion of music, which, though it was silent, awoke echoes in the beholder.

Alfred did not speak, but he felt those echoes, and they fired him with burning thoughts. Had he come within reach of such a prize—grasped it in his hand, to have it snatched away? Was he to submit to such a wrong, when Annie, who inflicted it, was not a free agent? For she must be acting under pressure, if she consented to marry Harrifield, while he—Alfred—possessed her heart! Annie divined something of the tumult in his mind. She knew that her conduct seemed inexplicable—or *base*. For might not Alfred think that she sacrificed her love for the estate? The possibility of his contracting such a suspicion filled her with horror, and she forgot that she was now in a position in which her love for him should be renounced—at any rate, concealed, or, since she had allowed it to appear, be

referred to no more. She was familiar with the agony of suppression. It had been her burden for months, engaging her thoughts, and keeping her in constraint, so that her body seemed a prison, and often her spirit flung itself against the bars, as a bird against its cage. But now the torrent of feeling was too strong for control. It over-bore her scruples, and rushed out, like her tears.

"I thought you no longer loved me," she cried—"that you were lost to me, that my caprice and cruelty and selfishness had worn you out. But, instead of feeling I deserved this fate, I was angry with you. And it seemed immaterial what became of me, when you were indifferent: so I thought I could at least serve my family. Perhaps, I am saying too much. But I couldn't endure that you should think so very ill of me. Now"—her voice choked, and she sobbed aloud, but resumed—"now I have said all."

Alfred made no reply, but he slid his arm round her waist, and held her in a moment's

embrace. Then he tore himself away, and darted from the room.

Gone ! without a word, but not without a sign. She was perplexed, anxious, miserable, but, with all this, she somehow felt soothed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ARABELLA TAKES A LEAP.

WHILE Harrifield was the subject of so much expectancy at Torquay, he was the centre of a group at Surbiton, where events equally tended to a crisis. The fair Arabella thought it time to look after Travers, and for this purpose made a call on Miss Cottle, on pretence of inquiring about Annie. She met Travers outside the house, as she was returning home, and accompanied him to the river, unconscious that Mrs. Booles, in watch and ward over the premises, had noted her visit to Miss Cottle, witnessed her encounter with her admirer, and followed them to the Thames. It was, indeed, not the first time that they had fallen under the

eye of the amateur detective, but, since her mistake about Dr. Chowler, Mrs. Booles was circumspect in tattling to the proctor's wife about her own family, resolving first to make sure of her ground. She believed that she had now a good case, and posted off to her patroness, to report her discoveries.

It may be necessary to state that Mrs. Chowler was becoming weary of her communications, and, from her growing prosperity, felt so fortified in her "position in the place," that she began to think of throwing her over, and leaving her slanderous tongue to do its worst. Mrs. Booles was sensible of a coolness, as Mrs. Chowler had been twice denied, while taking care to be seen at the window, but it was not Mrs. B.'s cue to be offended, and she now knocked at the door, strong in the consciousness of a mission.

"Will you say to Mrs. Chowler it's Mrs. Booles, please, and that I've got something very important to tell her!" she said to the housemaid, on her opening the portal.

" You're quite new come, I think, ain't you?" she added.

" Yes, last night," was the reply.

" And how do you like the place?"

" Can't stand it, and gived notice this morning."

She disappeared, leaving Mrs. Booles in the passage, where, all her ears being strained, she presently heard Mrs. Chowler announce that she was " not at home." Mrs. Booles now felt the advantage of having a mission. Though a little flustered, she determined to hold her ground, and, accordingly, sung out—" It's *me*, ma'am—Mrs. Booles, and I wish to see you very, very particular, only for half a minute."

This summons amazed Mrs. Chowler. She felt that Mrs. Booles must indeed have something to communicate, when she ventured on such a dash, and she shaped her answer to the occasion.

" Oh! is it Mrs. Booles. Come in—come in."

And the next moment saw them closeted together.

"That's a nice girl you've got, at last, ma'am," said Mrs. Booles, maliciously, in allusion to the housemaid; "she seems so respectable and well-spoken; and I'm sure you ought to get a treasure after the trouble you've had with servants--for I think this is the third time you've had to change this month. But girls think of nothing now, ma'am, but stuffing themselves, and tricking out their backs, and they've took to having trains, if you please. I sometimes wish there was no girls in the world--they're such a nuisance. My cousin, Lady Angelina de Vere, who is confidential—"

"You must come to the point," interrupted Mrs. Chowler; "for I am so busy this morning, I haven't a moment to spare."

"I wouldn't have called in upon you, ma'am, so early," replied Mrs. Booles, a little huffed—"only it's so important. But I am afraid some enemy has been speaking to you against me, ma'am—p'rhaps Jane, your friend Mrs. Major Noseworthy, as now is. Jane ought to remember how I have given her when she hadn't herself, ma'am,

and it comes very hard upon me, who have kept twenty-eight servants—and *you* know what servants are—to have Jane turn up her nose at me, though she *is* Mrs. Major Noseworthy. But—”

“ My good Mrs. Booles, the lady you mention has never uttered your name to me; so you are quite mistaken. But I can’t stop this morning: I must hear wha you’ve to say some other day.”

“ Certainly, if you please, ma’am. You know best whether there should be such goings-on, but I thought other people might notice about Miss Chowler, and that you would like to know about it from me first?”

“ Know from you!” cried the proctor’s wife, firing up. “ Pray what have you to say about Miss Chowler?”

Mrs. Booles was a little upset by this retort, but the mission again showed its might, and nerved her anew.

“ More than she thinks of, perhaps, more than you’ll thank me for telling, ma’am. But, of course, I don’t want to make myself a busybody; only you’ve been a friend to

me, and as for what might be said about me by an enemy, even if it's Jane—begging your pardon, ma'am, but you might like me to call her Mrs. Major Noseworthy—why I leave it to their own conscience."

With which declaration Mrs. Booles pretended to be on the point of departure.

"Now don't get your back up about nothing, Mrs. Booles," cried Mrs. Chowler; "a sensible woman like you. I wonder you could think I should listen to any tales about you, come from whom they might. But naturally I am fidgety that there should be any talk about my daughter, in a gossiping place like this."

"Naturally, ma'am."

"And what is it all about?"

"Well, ma'am, the long and the short of it is, she goes on the water with a gentleman—leastways, I suppose he calls himself a gentleman."

"Calls himself!—yes, and is a gentleman, too! Well, I am sure! Pray, mayn't my daughter go on the water without it's being talked about all over Surbiton, and

without her being followed and watched by you? A pretty thing, indeed! And you to come and tell it to me, as if it was something underhand!"

Well had it been if Mrs. Chowler had stopped with this thrust, which completely transfixed Mrs. Booles, but, unluckily, she was tempted on, and tripped herself up.

"And to speak in such a way of Mr. Alfred Mockright!" she continued. "I should like to know who is a gentleman, if he is not."

Instantly Mrs. Booles sprang to her feet.

"Your daughter wasn't with Mr. Alfred Mockright, ma'am," she cried, exultingly; "she was with one of that woman Cottle's lodgers; they've gone off on the river together; and a fortnight ago, she was out all day with both of them, and one of the lodgers came home like a drowned rat, and a boatman told me they'd been having a fine lark up the river—yes, a fine lark, he said. But it's no business of mine, and—"

"Get out of my house, you wretch," screamed Mrs. Chowler, frantic at her

daughter's indiscretion, and her informant's triumph, and giving a violent pull at the bell as she spoke.

Mrs. Booles would have parleyed, but her repentance came too late, and the door was banged in her face, as she turned to make her peace.

Happy it was for Arabella that she did not appear at this moment. Her prolonged absence, indeed, frenzied her mother, and led her to imagine the most shocking consequences, but it gave time to consider what should be done. If Arabella had at once presented herself, Mrs. Chowler might have resorted to personal correction, at least, so far as to box her ears ; but reflection decided her to hold back her hands, since she was not yet at the bottom of the affair, and content herself with locking Arabella up. Three mortal hours had she to wait for the opportunity of taking this satisfaction. Then it was pitiable to note the approach of the unsuspecting girl, all smiles, and thinking harm of nobody. Of course, she ran straight into the lion's mouth.

"How long you have been out!" her mother said; "on the water, I suppose? Why didn't you bring Alfred home with you?"

"He is obliged to go to town," answered Arabella, a little confused.

"He doesn't seem to be so particular about going to town. Your father, indeed, says he sticks to business very close, but I can't reconcile that with his jauntings with you, sometimes for a whole day together. Anyhow, I think it is time to make out his intentions, and I shall know something about them this very day."

"Psha, mamair, how you talk! But I beg you won't interfere. I know what I am doing, and when a third person steps in it is only meddle and muddle."

"Muddle, you hussy! yes, you have made a muddle indeed. You *know what you are doing*, do you? And I will let you see that I know, too! You must go on the water with two strange men, must you? and think to gull me about Alfred Mockright? You minx! and to come and stand me out

to my face. Get out of my sight—or rather I'll take care you don't get out of it, till I confront you with your father."

This outburst fell like an accusing spirit on Arabella, and she burst into a universal blush, from the crown of her forehead to the tip of her toe. But there was no time for consideration. Mrs. Chowler had hardly spoken, when she jumped on her feet, and Arabella thought it prudent to make for her own room. In fact, she was in dread of the personal correction which her mother first contemplated, and her intention was to lock her door on the inside, while her mother designed to lock it without. She reached the room breathless, and banged to the door, but, alas ! the key was missing. Her mother was but a step behind, and she had no resource but to plant herself against the door.

" You sha'n't come in," she cried. " You want to beat me, and I won't let you in, and if you force the door, I'll jump out of the window."

" I wish you would, and there would be

an end of you, and our disgrace," replied the Spartan Mrs. Chowler. "But you shall go out of the window if you go out at all."

So she turned the key in the door, and Arabella heard her retire down the stairs.

Here was a situation ! not so bad as it might have been, indeed ; for Arabella's ears only burned, when they might have tingled, and her back was unslapped. Still, there was room for grumbling. One doesn't relish being under lock and key, like a pickpocket or a Fenian ; and Arabella sat down to make the most of this grievance. Gradually she succeeded in turning it into a romance. Certainly there was a ground of fiction—her little deception about Alfred ; and now she was suffering persecution for love ! Many a three-volume novel has no better elements. But love laughs at locksmiths. She reflected that she ought to write to Travers, and let him know her position, and how she had no hope but in him. Soon as the thought entered her mind, she proceeded to put it in execution, never pausing to consider who was to deliver

the note, or rather pamphlet, for it extended over two sheets of paper, both of which were crossed. The composition was finished before she remembered her lover's aversion to anything *long*. It seemed a pity to suppress so much fine writing, not to say fine feeling; but there was no help for it, and she had to compress her soul into the following billet:—

“ DEAR MR. T.

“ But why should I not say dear, *dear* Tom? for there speaks my heart, this poor pierced heart, which *you* have made *your own*. All is found out! *I am locked up in my room!!* Oh! come, come, COME! How shall I survive this blow! Yet it is for you —*that* consoles, *supports* me. I feel you will never desert

“ Your loving, distracted

“ ARABELLA.”

This billet was enclosed in an envelope, sealed with wax (in order that a kiss might be dropped on the back), and addressed to “Tom Travers, Esq., at Miss Cottle's, Vic-

toria Road." It now remained only to find a messenger, and Arabella planted herself at the open window, to watch for a passer-by. Presently who should appear but just such a person as she could have wished—no other, indeed, than her father's satellite, Touton. She afterwards learnt that her father had been summoned to a conference in the country, and despatched Touton to report the fact to Mrs. Chowler, in order that she might not expect him home till the next evening.

Happily Touton looked up, as he passed round the garden by the window, and Arabella threw him the note, and enjoined secrecy by raising her finger to her lips. Touton gracefully laid his finger on his nose, as a countersign, and disappeared.

The address on the note acquainted him with the whole business. He had just been instructed by Mrs. Chowler to learn all he could about Travers, and make an immediate report to her husband, and here the gods dropped into his hand a billet, indited to Travers by Arabella. It was such a coincidence as could only happen in a love affair,

and set Touton considering whether he could so act as to bring things to a settlement.

His first measure was to deliver the note, and his knock at Miss Cottle's door brought out Midge, whose tidy development took him by surprise.

"Good morning, miss," he said, "Why I ain't seen you up *yonder*"—he nodded in the supposed direction of Doctors' Commons, though it was really the opposite one—"yet you've come into a fortune, I expect, or a legacy, haven't you? Well, I hope you'll never be out at elbows again."

"I'm now trying to be tidy, sir, but I ain't half tidy enough," answered Midge, aspiring to higher perfection.

"That's a matter of opinion. When I see a young woman tidy about her apron, I reckon that she's tidy all over, and I must say your apron is stunning. I'm quite took with it." Here Touton felt the texture of the raiment in question. "Now what might you give a yard for that, if it's a fair question, because I'll get my missis to make me some like it?"

"Go along with you, sir," laughed Midge.
"What do *you* want with an apron?"

"That's a question as would puzzle the longest heads in this constitutional country. I wear an apron, but what I want with it is no business of mine, and it is a point I ain't going to enter into. You might as well ask why judges and proctors and councillors wear a wig. It ain't because they've got no hair of their own (though many of 'em's bald, I admit), and it ain't to take care of my clothes I wear an apron. And now see here! I've got a note for Mr. Travers. Is he *in*?"

"No, sir, he isn't in: he's out."

"That follows, nat'rally. Now you tell me about him. Is he a sporting gent, or a boating gent?"

"I don't know which he is, sir," answered Midge, under the impression that Touton's question was exhaustive, and comprised everything that Travers could possibly be.
"But he doesn't do anything for his living."

"Then, he's a moneyed gent—what some call a swell; and I'd as lieve have to do with

no gent at all. Swells are a bad lot in general, though there is good among 'em. They're like nuts, all the same outside ; but when you crack 'em, only a few has a kernel, the most being withered up. Now, candid, what's your opinion about Mr. Travers ?"

Midge looked round, then lowered her voice, while her mouth spread into a grin. " Well," she said, "*he's a cure !*"

" Is he though ?"

" The things he's taught our Poll," pursued the confidential Midge, " would send you into fits with laughing."

" You don't say so ?" *

" He never laughs hisself, yet you never knew such a funny," continued Midge. " And there's only one thing puts him out —when you *abhor* Mr. Harrifield, who lives along with him. *That* sets him up."

" But that ain't in your line."

" Yes, it is : I'm always abhorring. And when Mr. Travers makes signs to me, and sort of whispers (only I don't hear what he says), I gets dreadful, till at last he'll sing out loud—*don't abhor !* But I declare, here he is."

In a moment, Travers came up, yawning, and Touton presented the note. This Travers put in his pocket, without even looking at the address.

"Will there be any answer, sir, if you please?" asked the astonished Touton.

"I don't know," replied Travers. "I will consider about it."

"It's from Miss Chowler, sir," rejoined Touton, in a lower tone, "and I think it is rather particular, because she threw it out of the window to me."

This intimation woke up Travers—in fact, gave him a sensation, and, thus quickened, he opened and read the note.

"Awful!" he muttered. But his faculties cleared at the prospect of some excitement, and he recurred to a plan which, in anticipation of eventualities, had for some time been floating in his mind.

"Can you undertake that Miss Chowler shall have my answer?" he asked of Touton.

"You write it, sir, and I'll contrive the delivery somehow," replied the porter.

On this guarantee Travers penned the following billet:—

“DEAR GIRL,—I can’t *come*, if that means I am to go through an explanation with your governor. I should break down in it. But I will tell you what. You manage to meet me at Waterloo to-morrow morning at ten. We will get a license, and I have a friend who will marry us. Then the affair will explain itself. Ever your attached

“TOM TRAVERS.”

While matters were thus in train with the lovers, Mrs. Chowler was burning to impart her discoveries to her husband, and join their powers to promote the same object. To wait his return home, was, in such an emergency, impossible; and the next morning saw her astir with the intention of proceeding to his office. But, with all her promptitude, her intelligence was forestalled by Touton, who saw the Doctor before her arrival, and set him at ease on the affair. Nevertheless, the Doctor per-

mitted her to have her say, as a relief to her mind, and only unfolded himself when his composure provoked her to explode.

"Now do moderate your fervour," he then said, with aggravating coolness. "I know more about this than you do, and I can tell you Arry hasn't done a bad thing for herself. You think you are very clever, but she can give you a wrinkle or two, and manage very well for herself besides."

"A nice management, and a nice father to back her up in it," replied Mrs. Chowler. "But, of course, you will be on her side, if it is against me."

"Madam, this is a place for business—not for family jars," said Dr. Chowler, severely. "And let me tell you I will have none of your interference in this matter—no, nor will I interfere myself. Mr. Travers is a peculiar character, and won't stand it; and Arabella understands him so well, she may be trusted to make him do what is proper."

Arabella, indeed, was so bent on Travers

doing the proper thing, that she forgot the duty in herself, in so far that, on her mother's departure from town, she emerged from captivity by the window, in order to enable him to keep up to the mark. So it happened that Travers brought her in a cab to Doctors' Commons, and, leaving her in the vehicle, alighted to procure a license. He was instantly accosted by Touton.

"This way, sir, if you please. I'll find you a proctor."

"Ah! you're the man who brought the note," replied Travers. "Well, we are here, you see."

"Yes, sir—all right. You're coming in among the latest batch, for they're going to abolish the Commons at last. Well, now they've so took to abolishing, I wish they'd abolish the business as well as the Commons—I don't mean the marrying part (that wouldn't do), but the *unmarrying*, though that mightn't be good for everybody, neither. But I dare say they'll abolish me next, and then I needn't care what's done. Come in here, sir, please."

And Touton introduced the visitor into Dr. Chowler's swearing-room.

"Gent for a license," he observed to the clerk, with a wink.

The clerk notified his chief in the inner chamber, whence Dr. Chowler, regardless of his protesting spouse, presently appeared, habited in cap and gown.

"What are the names of the parties?" he inquired, "and where do they reside?"

"Tom Travers, of the Albany, and Arabella Chowler, of Surbiton," was the reply.

"Either a minor?"

"Yes, the lady."

"Any impediment to the marriage?"

"None whatever," answered Travers, mentally adding, "barring an explanation with her governor."

"Where is the marriage to take place, and when?"

"At St. James's, Piccadilly, at a quarter to twelve."

"Has either party resided in that parish for fifteen days?"

"My permanent residence is in the Albany."

The clerk here handed Travers the Book, observing, "You have stated the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth——"

Travers unhesitatingly kissed the Volume, and left the office with the license, while Dr. Chowler returned to his wife.

"They are to be married at a quarter to twelve, at St. James's," he said, "and we must be there."

"But Arabella is locked up at home," half screamed Mrs. Chowler.

"You mean, you left her there. And you suppose that locking a girl up would prevent her getting out to be married. Ah! when will women learn anything about themselves? However, she is now in the cab with him, and we must follow at once, if we are to witness the marriage."

"It shan't be—I won't have it!" cried Mrs. Chowler. "My daughter married in this sneaking way!—No carriages, no breakfast, nothing to keep up our position."

"But you save all the expense. Is that nothing?"

"Nothing in this case," answered Mrs. Chowler, ready to cry with vexation.

In fact, the stingiest of women, who almost grudged the cost of her own food, was willing to be lavish at the marriage of her daughter, her only child, whose bridal, she thought, ought also to have been a triumph for her mother. But she saw it was useless to object further, and sullenly accompanied her husband to the church.

The bridal pair already stood at the altar, where they had been joined by Harrifield and Miss Cottle; and soon they were united in the bonds of wedlock. Mrs. Chowler could no longer restrain herself, and dashed into the circle, drawing from Arabella a suppressed cry.

"What is the matter?" asked the bridegroom.

"I—I feel a *sensation!*" replied Arabella. And she threw her arms round her mother's neck.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE PRECIPICE AT WATCOMBE.

HARRIFIELD left the bridal party at the church door, whence they proceeded to breakfast at the Clarendon, while he, in accordance with previous arrangements, started for the railway, to catch the express for Torquay. This object he accomplished, and night found him lodged in one of the hotels which Torquay provides for its visitors.

The next morning showed him the beautiful watering-place to advantage. In front stretched the bay, hedged round by its amphitheatre of slopes, green and sunlit; above spread the clear sky, and the blue sea lay like another sky below. On the opposite shore Brixham showed its white tene-.

ments in the distance, and nearer rose Paignton Tower, watching over a cluster of dwellings, while the sheet of water between bore craft of every size, from a mighty ironclad, at anchor, to a cockboat, and now caught the eye with the red sail of a trawler, now with the streamer of a yacht. The high tide filled the harbour, bringing the health-giving sea up to the Strand, or esplanade, which, encircling the basin, swept back in a thoroughfare to gay shops. Here the "Royal Library" invited Harrifield to order the last novel, which of course, he did, and then came forth to survey the bay *inland*—the bay of villa and garden, climbing from the depth to the top of Warren and Braddon hills, and hanging from the heights of the Warberry and Waldron.

Harrifield was strolling along, when he was hailed from a passing carriage, which, at the same moment, drew up, and confronted him with a party of friends.

"We are going to Watcombe, one of the prettiest spots in the neighbourhood," cried

Lady Clara ; "and I must have you with us."

"You are loaded, already," replied Harrifield, with a nod to Mullet and De Jonnes.

"Here is a reserved seat for you," rejoined Lady Clara, showing a place at her side.

"You owe it to Lady Clara's blundering," said Mullet, as Harrifield sprang in, and the carriage resumed its course.

"*My* blundering, indeed—now that is really too bad," cried Lady Clara.

"Well, say it was mine—of course, it was mine ; only I did exactly what you told me," observed Mullet. "You said *leave that note and card at the Belgrave hotel.*"

"What I said was, *next door* to the Belgrave hotel."

"That was what you *meant* to say, I have no doubt, but you always try to spare your words, and the consequence is, you never make yourself understood—in regard to appointments, I mean ; for nobody can be clearer in conversation—*nobody* ! All you

want, is, to be practical—and, unfortunately, that is what a woman can't be!"

"Now, Mullet, do get out of that sneaking way of throwing the blame on everybody but yourself," said Harrifield. "It is you who need to be practical, my dear fellow. I don't know the facts in this case, but I feel quite sure the blunder was—"

"Was mine!" laughed Mullet. "To be sure. I am the man—or rather the whipping-boy. Didn't I tell you, beforehand, it would be laid on me, De Jonnes? Now, speak out!"

"Well, you certainly did;" answered De Jonnes, as if he were replying to a judicial interrogation.

"There!" cried Mullet, triumphantly.

"It may be my mistake, but I could be almost positive I said *next door*," rejoined Lady Clara. "However, my note didn't reach Annie Blandford, and when we called for her this morning"—she now addressed Harrifield—"she and Mrs. Blandford had gone out; and we have had to come without her."

The mention of Annie seemed to move Harrifield.

"So the Blandfords are here?" he said to Lady Clara, in a low tone.

"Yes; and they will help us to save you from being bored," replied Lady Clara, "though you look as if you didn't care for their company. I hope you and Annie haven't had a fall out?"

"Well, I fear I may have offended her."

"Not past forgiveness, I daresay. She naturally inclines to clemency."

"Ah! you all do that. What would become of poor men, if you didn't! for we need constant mercy. Is not our name frailty? The slanderous poet, indeed, says it is woman's, but we all know better, and acknowledge, in our hearts, that woman is the sterner stuff."

"What a conclusion! I really thought you were coming to something pretty, when you broke in with that! Now I should like to know how we can at once be stern and pitiful."

"Too easily. You are stern in virtue,

pitiful to transgression. But, to be serious, you must aid me to make my peace with the belle Blandford."

This speech gladdened Lady Clara, who straightway launched into commendation of Annie, and would have brought out all her virtues, only that Mr. Mullet, having talked De Jonnes to death, made a dash at Harrifield, and thus diverted the conversation.

So they drove through Marychurch, and entered the pretty approach to Watcombe, when a sudden turn opened a glimpse of the dell. The carriage stopped where a villa stood like the lodge of this manor of Nature, a lodge, bountiful as Nature herself, welcoming all comers. Our party alighted on the down, and entered the grounds, whence they could look round on hill, sea, and sky, from the midst of flowers. Lady Clara was more interested in the flowers than the scene, but the scene enchain'd Harrifield, and he stood to gaze, while the others walked on. Then a path lured him into the dell, where he was instantly in solitude.

Behind rose towering cliffs, green as

emeralds, save where the rock burst, at two or three points, through this vesture, showing its naked muscle in flesh-colour. The slopes were rippled by sheep-paths, looking like the vestiges of waves, and one could fancy that the seas of bygone worlds had here registered their tides. Elsewhere the cliffs fell in precipices, mantled with bush, or hung with ivy, bramble, and wild clematis, now bursting in a cascade from the mid-height, now streaming from the summit. Then came verdant knolls, and banks, and hollows, in infinite diversity, bottoming the dell with labyrinths, which everywhere spread a carpet of sward. So weird were the undulations, that superstition might think it had entered a haunt of fairies, and, certainly, on these banks Titania might have slept, and through these mazes elves have danced—

“Every elf and fairy sprite
Hop as high as bird from brier,
And this ditty, after me,
Sing and dance it trippingly.”

The birds were there, high in the air,

and singing, too ; and there also were briars, in fairy rings, so that you half looked to see Robin Goodfellow peer from behind, to see who intruded.

Harrifield sauntered on, climbing little steeps, and descending slopes, and winding through clefts, till, at last, a step upward brought him on a plateau of lawn, whence he discerned the sea. From this point the waters seemed to be at such depth below, and the sky arched such a height above, that you might think the earth had opened, and showed you its very centre. Harrifield caught the inspiration of the scene. Blind, indeed, must he be, to whose imagination this did not present a mirror, in which he could behold the littleness of man and man's world, and catch the reflection of a MYSTERY ! Truly it was a spot to commune with one's own heart, and be still—the silence, the lowliness, the immensity, the beauty of the prospect, and the harmony which fused it together, all bore that touch of Nature which makes not only the whole world, but the universe kin.

Harrifield was not the sole observer of the scene. Close to the sea stood a woman, who, with her feet on the verge of the crag, looked down at the depth below. The situation might have dizzied an ordinary gazer. Indeed, it was hardly safe; for the crag projected, and the overhanging brink seemed to rest on bramble, which gushed, as it were, from the rock beneath. Hence you could see no bottom, but the sea appeared in front, and you wondered whether it came to the foot of the cliffs, or found its boundary on a strip of beach. Then you thought how it would fare with one who fell over — or *one who threw himself down!* Such ideas come into our heads! The woman, caught by this influence, suddenly drew back, shuddered, and seated herself on a bench, a step or two in the rear.

This spot had been the haunt of her childhood. She had sat here in that hour of her innocence, and she came to seek comfort in its memories after her career of action. There are few who do not feel the magnetism of such affinities, and to some they are as

effective as a ministry. They call you back from a far country ; and revive in you those sympathies which are our common heritage, but which we have thrown away as some waste their heritage of money. It is good to have this visitation, if it be only for a moment—only in memory ; for it will, at least, remind you that such things can be, and the display of good feeling, by others, will not inevitably excite your distrust. Think how sad is it to walk in the world like a soldier in a hostile country, seeing a masked battery in every green bank !

Kindlier thoughts recurred to Jessie, gathered here as here she once gathered daisies, and wove them in wreaths, knitting them with wild rose and honeysuckle, and decking herself in this bravery. Let those tears flow ! Sorrowful, they were, indeed, but not bitter ; for they sprang from a re-claimed heart. Is it true that we

“ — are moulded out of faults ;
And, for the most, become much more the better
For being a little bad ?”

This was apparently the course of Jessie,
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for her faults had disciplined her into goodness. She felt their sting, and plucked them from her breast, now no longer a dark closet, but a refuge for repentance. Even the fierce flame of her love was subdued. The love remained, but it did not consume ; it rather stood like a taper's light before a shrine. Here she meditated ; here she knelt ; and here she prayed.

“Jessie ! is it—can it be you ?” exclaimed an eager voice.

Jessie started at the salutation, and her face flushed, but she calmed in a moment. She knew the voice of Harrifield.

“What a strange thing that we should meet here !” she said, quietly.

Her manner disturbed Harrifield.

“Not so strange as that you should meet me coldly,” he replied.

“Am I cold ? Then, it is from no unkindness, nor will you, I am sure, judge me unkindly.”

“Love and heaven forbid !” exclaimed Harrifield.

He stepped nearer as he spoke, took her

hand, and, retaining this in his clasp, sat down by her side. She gently tried to draw her hand away.

"I lost this treasure once—twice!" said Harrifield. "Is it to be snatched from me a third time?"

He slightly relaxed his hold, and she withdrew her hand, letting it fall in her lap.

"It is well that you should abjure me," he resumed. "My life has been a wasted one, and—I fear, it has cast a shadow on yours—yours which I once might have brightened. Still forgive me, Jessie! I have erred from thoughtlessness as much as vice—not that this excuses me, but it appeals for your pardon, seeing that some way or other, everyone sins against somebody."

"It is I who have sinned, not you," answered Jessie, in a faltering voice. "I have allowed myself to be carried away by my feelings—and they have not been good feelings. I told you I loved 'you—loved, yes! but with a love that put myself first, that forgot modesty, that ignored your interests, that schemed, plotted, and intrigued

to win— alas ! to ensnare you ! Cry shame upon me, Charles Harrifield ! upbraid me ! And yet—oh, yes ! sometimes think pitifully of me—sometimes, when you are alone and chance recalls me to memory.”

“ It will not be chance,” said Harrifield, in subdued tones.

“ And we part friends ?” faltered Jessie.

“ No !” exclaimed Harrifield.

Her heart sank, and a film came over her eyes.

“ I shall never part with you again,” pursued Harrifield, with a loving look in his face.

Now her heart took a bound, a lump rose in her throat, and she seemed to lose her breath. The sea and the sky met, the earth spun round, and she could only stay herself by catching at his breast.

“ I am a weak woman—I am selfish and despairing. Don’t tempt me, dear Charles. Don’t let me drag you from fortune and rank, and from all who now love and honour you. No ! no ! it must not be. My love is satisfied that I have rested a moment on

your bosom, and felt it respond to mine. Now I must try to forget myself, and think of you—you who almost teach me to be generous, who offer to give up for me so much. Oh ! bless you—bless my own true love ! bless this noble breast, which now I resign for ever !”

“ But I won’t resign this !” cried Harrifield, drawing her back—“ not for all that fortune or the world can give. You be mine —say you are so—” and he felt Jessie’s fingers cling round his arm—“ and I am ready to forego such things, and begin a battle in life with you. What ! is there nothing to sigh for but money ? Let me live for you, and with you, and I feel that you will so influence my course that I shall not live in vain.”

He bent down and pressed his lips to hers.

“ You promise !” he said.

She raised her eyes, but her lips remained closed.

“ I must have your word—your troth-plight,” pursued Harrifield, with a bright smile.

Jessie put her arms round his neck, and whispered in his ear, confirming the pledge in the most orthodox, and, at the same time, assuring manner. Harrifield could not resist the conviction of such a kiss from such lips.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MR. BLANDFORD ON HIS BEST BEHAVIOUR.

ALFRED parted from Annie, but did not quit the house. He stood a moment in the passage to collect himself, and then descended to the hall, and summoned a servant.

“Have you told Mr. Blandford that I am waiting to see him?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” was the reply. “He was engaged with Mrs. Blandford, but said he would be with you in a minute. I think he is now coming, sir.”

As he spoke, Mr. Blandford emerged from an adjacent room, and Alfred met him half-way.

“I found Miss Blandford in the drawing-room, where the servant took me,” he said,

"so I have used the freedom of coming down-stairs again, as I wish to see you alone."

"You have done well," replied Mr. Blandford. He turned to another room. "We shall be by ourselves here," he said. And he led the way in.

"Our business proves to be a very tangled one," observed Alfred, when they sat down ; "for the thread is lost at the very point at issue."

"Then, your researches have been without result?" answered Mr. Blandford, with his greatest suavity.

"On the contrary, they have elicited some stubborn facts, but these facts are not conclusive. I find there were two James Selwyns living in the same locality, at the same date ; stranger still, there were two Agnes Selwyns. Here my investigation came to an end. Indeed, I was afraid to inquire further, lest I should discover too much."

"You apprehend that you would be led up to the identification of my father's first wife?"

"Precisely ; and, as I told you before, it

is for the other side to obtain this evidence. As regards my own feeling in the matter, and your interests, I had rather remain in uncertainty about it, unless the course of the proceedings drives us to inquiry."

"Then, you have an impression that the case is at bottom against us?"

"I understood that to be your own impression, and this makes me cautious; but I don't allow myself to form any conclusion. At the same time, I consider our situation to be one that dictates a compromise; and finding from your note that you shared this opinion—finding also that the other side were well disposed, I have thought it my duty to have a conference with Mr. Ravel, and hear what he has to say."

"A very proper step, though I am aware of their disposition to settle the matter by a marriage."

Alfred drew a deep breath. "The marriage project has fallen through," he said, with some constraint.

"Indeed," replied Mr. Blandford, lifting his brows.

"It was found that Mr. Harrifield cherished an attachment for another lady," rejoined Alfred; "an attachment so rooted, that he avowed his readiness to sacrifice for it not only every consideration of interest, but even the countenance of his family."

Mr. Blandford reflected a moment before he replied to this announcement, or rather, he took time to repress his rage.

"Harrifield has always been a madman, and I suppose he will remain one to the end of the chapter," he then said. "But what basis is now left us for a compromise?"

Alfred produced a newspaper, and pointed to an advertisement, couched in the following terms:—

"ONE HUNDRED POUNDS will be paid to any person who can give information proving the parentage of AGNES SELWYN, who lived at Lazenby, in the county of Warwick, between the years 1798 and 1811, and who, about the latter date, married ROBERT BLANDFORD, Esquire, of Lazenby. Apply to Mr. Ravel, solicitor, Lincoln's-Inn Fields."

"They are brought to the same block as

ourselves," remarked Mr. Blandford, with fading colour.

"But any moment may enable them to clear this obstacle," rejoined Alfred.

"No doubt. Still, they are at a stand for the present."

"This is the ground on which I met Ravel, and, after due fencing, we came to an understanding. It is one on which I will offer you no advice, but simply place it before you, and you must decide whether you will accept it, or take the chances of litigation. But I must tell you that Ravel himself is not hearty in the proposal. He was friendly to the project of a marriage, but he considers that he is now giving up his case, and he acknowledged that a pressure was put upon him by Mr. Harrifield."

"Ah! Harrifield wants the bird in hand," said Mr. Blandford, with his sardonic smile. "Not so mad, after all."

"I think it is rather that he wishes to meet you in a kindly spirit," answered Alfred. "He says that the estate will ultimately be his, and that you have at least a

moral claim upon it for your life ; so that he is anxious to avoid a suit, provided his grounds for one are duly considered."

" Which means, I am to buy him off," said Mr. Blandford, his face clearing. " Well, what is the price ?"

" Pardon me, but I must not allow you to put such a construction on Mr. Harrifield's motives, which are above impeachment," returned Alfred. " He is acting in opposition to the counsel of his solicitor, and few in his place would take the same view, though it is one which certainly is commended as much by prudence as good feeling. You know there is the glorious uncertainty of the law to be considered by both sides. But to be brief. Ravel undertakes that proceedings shall be stayed, and that you shall be left in undisturbed possession, on your settling a charge on the estate of one-fourth of the rents for the benefit of Mr. Harrifield."

" Fifteen hundred a-year," murmured Mr. Blandford. But he made no pause for consideration. " Let me have done with the

business, and cast its deadweight from my mind," he said. "I authorise you to accept the terms." Here he stood up. "Something more!" he continued, with the courtly air he could so well assume. "Let me thank you for bringing the affair to such an issue—for kind exertions and able counsel. Fortune places you above the recompense of money. Permit your debtor to consider himself your friend."

Alfred never expected such appreciation from Mr. Blandford, and considering how it might bear on his destiny—remembering all he had suffered, and how he had wrought up to this success—seeing himself on a pinnacle of hope and promise, he seemed to become unmanned. The long strain on his nature snapped; his eyes grew moist, and he allowed Mr. Blandford to take his hand in silence. But a moment brought back his self-possession.

"You speak of recompense," he said, earnestly; "since you are so good as to think I deserve one, let me ask the highest in your gift—the highest on earth for me. I

have long loved Annie—loved her above everything in life ; and I believe my attachment is returned. Ah, sir ! say you sanction my addresses, and you will make me the happiest of men.”

“I could wish nothing better for Annie, and if she indeed loves you, it will make her the happiest of women.”

It was with these words ringing in his ear that Alfred flew to the drawing-room.

Annie, as he hoped, was still there, though not alone, having been joined by her mother. His bright look caused them both to start up.

“Annie, you are mine !” he cried, folding her in his arms. “It is all settled ; the estate is secured ; and your father consents to our marriage.”

Annie uttered a cry of joy. Alfred stopped further speech by a kiss, and then, still holding Annie round the waist, held out his hand to Mrs. Blandford.

“You are now my son !” said the overjoyed mother, with streaming eyes. “And Annie loves you ! what I thought, and what

I wished. My years of sorrow have led me to joy, and Heaven is shedding its sunshine on the evening of my life. Let none despair, as I did, of seeing good days. How things will end is not to be foreseen. We should wait and hope, and what is to be the issue TIME WILL TELL."

Not many weeks passed before our several lovers obtained their reward, the knot of Hymen. Annie was married at St. Luke's church, Torquay, in order that Lady Clara, whose health was too delicate to stand a winter journey to London, might be present; and the ceremony was attended by half the ladies in the town. A glowing account of the event appeared in the *Torquay Directory* and the *Western Daily Mercury*, the two enlighteners of that part of England; and thus we come to know that the train of bridesmaids included the bridegroom's two sisters, Miss Mockright and

Miss Ada Mockright. Children in white strewed flowers before the bride, as she came down the church, the cynosure of all eyes. The proceedings were closed by a sumptuous breakfast, and the departure of the happy pair for Sunnyford Hall, Mr. Blandford's seat in Devonshire.

Jessie and Harrifield received the nuptial benediction at St. George's, Hanover-square, in the presence of a large party of fashionables. But it was remarked that the company included none of the bridegroom's relations, and there were not wanting whispers of their disapproval of the match. Whether these were true or not, the male spectators agreed that Harrifield could not have chosen better, if he desired beauty; though the ladies were of a different opinion, affirming that they could not see what there was in the bride to admire. Happily, Jessie troubled not about their criticisms—perhaps, because she knew her attractions, and recognised the moment as a proof of their power. Harrifield showed that he was proud of her, and what need she care for beside?

A fortnight after the event, Harrifield received the following letter :—

“ DEAR CHARLEY,

“ I congratulate you on your marriage, though I can’t on your choice. But in this you were perfectly right to please yourself, though I daresay you will grumble at my doing the same thing—for I have conferred my hand and heart on an estimable young lady, the eldest daughter of our common mortgagee, Mr. Mockright. It is immaterial to me what you may think about this business, but I beg you won’t write me an abusive letter, as I am now seventy years of age, and cannot stand any annoyance.

“ Your kinsman,

“ BRAMBLECOURT.

“ P.S.—You may bring your wife to the Castle when you come back, and I will get Lady Bramblecourt to take her up.”

Thus Jane reached the elevation for which she sighed, though not by the way

she designed. Ada found a more suitable partner in a young barrister, an intimate of Alfred's, and never envied the greatness of her sister.

Mr. Ravel failed to obtain his "fancy," but he did not remain in single blessedness, consoling himself, after a little fretting and mooning, with a pretty widow, who sought his counsel and ended by becoming his counsellor. Of all our circle, Miss Cottle alone remains unmarried. But she is no longer solitary—no longer unloved, and her gentleness draws round her the sympathies of the young, when she is herself growing old, testifying to the power of the beauty that never fades, the beauty of woman's soul.

THE END.

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